

Unatego Central School District

Otego, New York

A Study to Examine the Utilization of the District's Schools



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CHAPTER 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Unatego Central School District, like many upstate school districts, is facing declining student enrollment and significant financial challenges. Realizing that business as usual is not an option for the future, the district chose to engage in a study to ascertain the best use of its facilities for the future. A consulting firm was engaged to work with a district advisory committee to answer the following questions:

- *Is there a better way....educationally and fiscally....to reconfigure the grades to provide a sound instructional program now and in the future?*
- *If so, how should the grades and facilities be arranged?*

Six meetings were held with the consultants and the advisory committee to consider a variety of options for answering the study questions. In the end, the following recommendations are made about the school facilities in Unatego.

1. It is recommended that, effective with the 2017-18 school year:
 - a. The Otego Elementary School should be closed;
 - b. Grades K-2 should be moved from the Otego Elementary School to the Unadilla Elementary School;
2. It is further recommended that, upon closing the Otego Elementary School, the school district should implement the staffing savings identified in this study using attrition.
3. It is further recommended that the district secure voter approval to establish a capital reserve account at its earliest convenience.
4. It is further recommended that the district fund its capital reserve account with the monies that are saved from the staffing reductions in #2 above, with any reductions in the district's debt service (\$75,976 in 2016-17, \$414 in 2017-18, and \$49,674 in 2018-19), and any other surplus funds that are generated at the end of the fiscal year.
5. It is further recommended that the district convene a facilities planning committee whose role it will be to develop a long term facilities plan for the district including the design of a new elementary school to be located on the middle/high school campus.



6. It is further recommended that the Unadilla Elementary School be closed in the same year that the new elementary school is ready for use.
7. It is further recommended that the district should immediately explore the possible sale and/or leasing of the Otego Elementary School and for the Unadilla Elementary School at a time that the elementary school is ready for use.
8. It is further recommended that the 5th grade remain in the Unadilla Elementary School. Given that the number of elementary grade sections may change in the future, should the district receive funding and be in a position of establishing a Pre-K program, decisions about the location of the Pre-K program and the 5th grade should be made at that time.



CHAPTER 2

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A study with this purpose and magnitude would not be possible without the support, cooperation, and encouragement of many individuals. We would first like to express our appreciation to the members of the advisory committee appointed by the Unatego Board of Education. The members of the committee included:

Terry Brown	Jeanne Butler	Heather Coleman
Ron Decker	Ed Frazier	Scott Garno
Kim Gascon	Patti Hoyt	Katie James
Lew Keyser	Ernie Kroll	Elaine Lowe
Katherine Mazourek	Kelly Poje	Tyler Post
Melanie Ruff	Fran Secor	Kim Trask

These committee members gave generously of their time to help ask the right questions and to provide direction in finding answers. Without their assistance this study would not be nearly as complete and responsive to the information needs of the Board of Education and residents of the Unatego Central School District.

Superintendent David Richards, his most helpful secretary Colleen Cioccarri, and his staff were also generous with their time as we continuously requested information. Without their willingness to accommodate our requests, the timeliness of this study would not have been achieved.

Finally, we wish to thank the members of the Unatego Board of Education. As all responsible school leadership teams, they took the risk of examining the use of district facilities knowing full well that simply asking questions about how to better use district buildings might raise some very uncomfortable issues. Despite this, they supported the study and actively followed the progress of the study, while always ensuring that all members of the community would be heard on this most important issue. This was no easy task, but they accepted the challenge!

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Background

This map shows the town of Otego, New York, and its surrounding areas. The town boundary is outlined in black. Major roads include State Hwy 88, County Hwy 4, County Hwy 3A, and County Hwy 6. The Otego River flows through the town, and several lakes are visible. Surrounding towns include Otego, Unadilla, Sidney, Franklin, and Laurens. The map also shows the Otego River and several lakes.



The Unatego school community has consistently shown its support for the education of resident students as noted in the historical voting pattern in the following table. Residents have passed school budgets each year for the past ten years as shown in Table 1.

Table 3.1 District Budget Vote History			
Year	Yes Votes	No Votes	Total Votes
2015	215	74	289
2014	161	59	220
2013	196	82	278
2012	434	187	621
2011	216	102	318
2010	215	172	387
2009	205	73	278
2008	233	106	339
2007	374	151	525
2006	372	168	540

**The Unatego school community has consistently
shown its support for education**

Nevertheless, finding the balance between the provision of a good education and the ability of a local community to provide the financial resources is an on-going challenge for any board of education and administration. Given the current economic condition of our country and our state and the continuing pressures to educate all children to higher levels, this challenge has become even more daunting over the past few years. It is the Board's appreciation and understanding of the fundamental significance of this challenge that served as the stimulus for this study.

As with all good boards of education, the Unatego Central School District Board of Education chose to examine possible ways to organize grades and buildings in the district in light of the challenges mentioned above.

The main focus of this study was framed by the following two "critical questions" the Board of Education and administration asked that the consultants address:

- *Is there a better way....educationally and fiscally....to reconfigure the grades to provide a sound instructional program now and in the future?*
- *If so, how should the grades and facilities be arranged?*



The timeline called for initiation of this study in mid-October 2015 with the final report due to the Board of Education around February 1, 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter.

The Board of Education selected Castallo & Silky, an educational consulting firm from Syracuse, New York to conduct this study. Mr. Alan Pole and Dr. William Silky led this study for the firm. Castallo & Silky has extensive experience in working with school districts in New York State that have considered a variety of reorganizational options.

To answer the “critical study questions”, a study design, which is presented in the next chapter, was developed with the express purpose of being transparent and complete. In order to emphasize the openness of this process, the consultants committed to the following guidelines for the study:

1. The study will be conducted in an open and fair manner;
2. All data will be presented to the Board of Education; and
3. Recommendations will:
 - a. benefit student learning,
 - b. be sensitive to the unique cultural context of Unatego,
 - c. not be influenced by special interest groups,
 - d. be educationally sound,
 - e. be fiscally responsible and realistic, and
 - f. provide a five to seven year perspective.

The study concludes with this final report to the Board of Education. While the advisory committee had significant input into the development of this study, the recommendations contained in this document represent those of the consultants only and are presented as a vehicle for engaging the Board in discussion regarding the best organization of the district, its programs, and its facilities.



CHAPTER 4

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study was based upon what is commonly known as “responsive evaluation.” In essence, this methodology requires the design of data collection methods *in response to* a critical study question. In this specific study, the Board of Education posed the following questions that drove this study.

- ***Is there a better way....educationally and fiscally....to reconfigure the grades to provide a sound instructional program now and in the future?***
- ***If so, how should the grades and facilities be arranged?***

The following is a summary of the major activities undertaken as part of the study design. The consultants gathered considerable data from the district and other agencies. These data were summarized and analyzed as they were received. The data gathering was focused by the questions that drove the study. In addition, the consultants conducted interviews with key district staff to gather perspectives on the various issues under study and to understand completely the meaning of the data that was gathered. A Board appointed advisory committee met with the consultant team on five occasions to review data that had been gathered, share thoughts and opinions, and to critique tentative recommendations before the study was concluded. Finally, a draft of this report was shared with the advisory committee to seek final thoughts from the group.

The final report was presented to the Board of Education in a public session on April 7, 2016.



CHAPTER 5

STUDENT ENROLLMENTS AND POPULATION TRENDS IN THE AREA

This section of the report provides a picture of the current status of the Unatego Central School District's student enrollment as well as an overview of the population trends in the area.

Student Enrollment History and Projections

Accurate enrollment projections are essential data for district long-range planning. Virtually all aspects of a district's operation (educational program, staffing, facilities, finances, etc.) are dependent on the number of students enrolled. For this reason, updated enrollment projections are crucial for this study and serve as the launching pad for our analysis.

The procedure for projecting student enrollments is referred to as the Cohort Survival Methodology. This methodology is highly reliable and is the most frequently used projective technique for making short-term school district enrollment projections. To calculate enrollment projections, the following data and procedures are used:

- Six-year history of district enrollment by grade level
- Calculation of survival ratios by grade level
- Kindergarten enrollment projections based on resident live births

A survival ratio is obtained by dividing a given grade's enrollment into the enrollment of the following grade a year later. For example, the number of students in grade 3 in any year is divided by the number of students in grade 2 of the previous year. The ratios indicate the proportion of the cohort "surviving" to the following year. Cohort refers to the enrollment in a grade for a given year.

Using grade-to-grade survival ratios, an average of these ratios for each cohort progression is obtained. This average is referred to as an average projection survival ratio. This ratio is then multiplied by each current grade enrollment to obtain the projected enrollment for the next successive year. The multiplicative process is continued for each successive year.

Survival ratios usually have values close to one, but may be less than or greater than one. Where the survival ratio is less than one, fewer students "survived" to the next grade. Where the survival ratio is greater than one, more students "survived" to the next grade. Grade-to-grade



survival ratios reflect the net effects of deaths, dropouts, the number of students who are home schooled, promotion/retention policies, transfers to and from nonpublic schools, and migration patterns in and out of the school district.

Since estimating births introduces a possible source of error into the model, it is advisable to limit enrollment projections to a period for which existing data on live residential births can be used. This means that enrollment projections are possible for five years into the future for the elementary grades, which is usually sufficient for most planning purposes. Beyond that point, the number of births must be estimated and the projective reliability is greatly reduced. Enrollment projections for grades 7 and 8 and for grades 9-12 can be projected for ten years into the future.

The methodology considered for this study was to extrapolate to kindergarten enrollment cohorts from live birth data. Live birth data for Unatego from 2002-2012 is shown in the following table:

Table 5.1 Number of Live Births, 2002 -2012	
Calendar Year	Number
2002	66
2003	69
2004	65
2005	63
2006	64
2007	65
2008	70
2009	64
2010	85
2011	52
2012	68
2013	59

Live births are then compared with the kindergarten enrollment five years into the future....babies born in 2010 will be in kindergarten in 2015-16, babies born in 2011 will be in kindergarten in 2016-17, and babies born in 2012 will be in kindergarten in 2017-18. An average ratio of live births to kindergarten enrollment five years later is then calculated. This ratio is then used to project future kindergarten enrollments from actual and estimated live births.



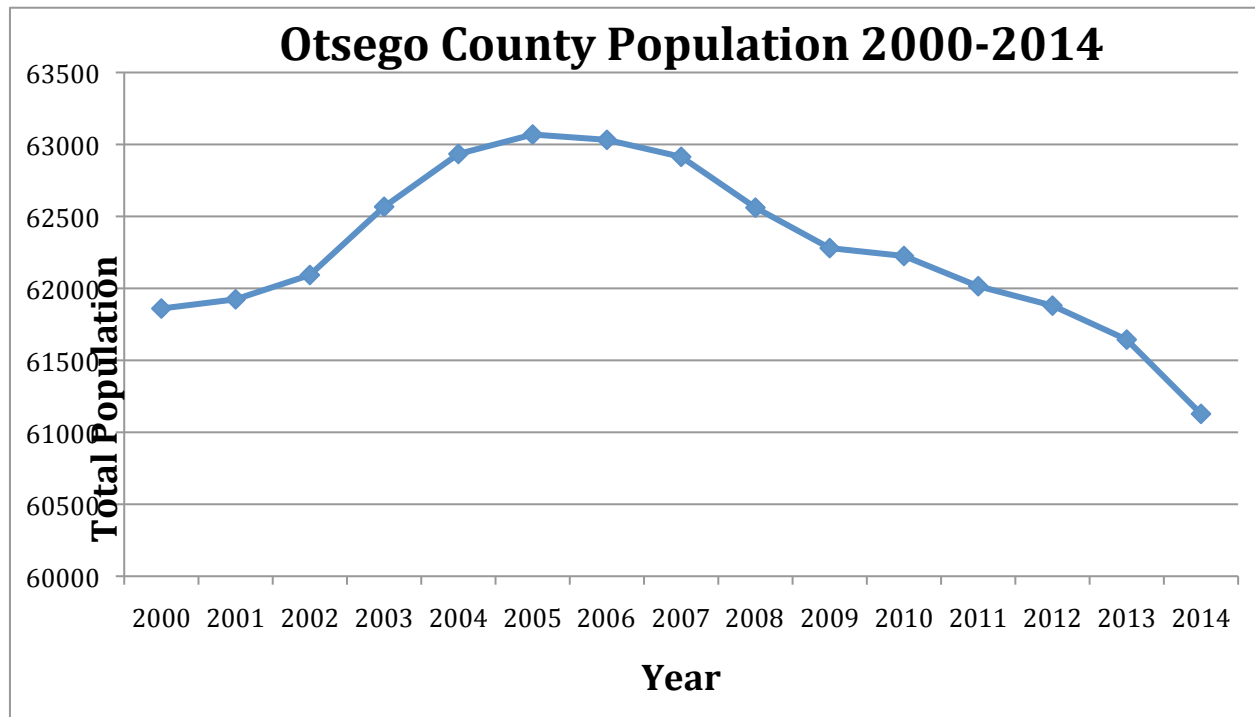
Now that we can predict future kindergarten enrollments we are able to complete the full table of future school enrollment as shown below.

Table 5.2 Unatego K-12 Enrollment History and Projections-2010-11 to 2022-23													
Grade	2010 -11	2011 -12	2012 -13	2013 -14	2014 -15	2015 -16	2016 -17	2017 -18	2018 -19	2019 -20	2020 -21	2021 -22	2022 -23
Birth Data	64	65	70	64	85	52	68	59	66	66	66	66	66
Pre-K	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
K	72	66	73	79	66	74	54	71	61	68	68	68	68
1	62	70	65	62	78	65	71	52	67	58	65	65	65
2	78	63	69	64	66	74	65	71	52	67	58	65	65
3	65	78	69	64	66	59	73	64	70	51	67	58	65
4	83	66	78	65	63	64	58	72	63	69	50	66	57
5	89	78	63	77	67	62	63	57	70	62	67	49	64
6	73	79	84	60	77	61	60	61	55	68	60	65	47
7	89	77	82	81	59	76	61	60	61	55	68	60	65
8	77	84	74	83	82	66	77	62	61	61	56	69	61
9	95	69	85	82	81	85	66	77	62	61	62	56	69
10	89	82	68	75	62	71	74	58	67	54	53	54	49
11	86	80	73	53	78	58	65	67	53	61	49	48	49
12	84	79	76	63	63	80	57	64	67	52	61	49	48
Total K-12	1042	971	959	908	908	895	844	835	809	789	784	772	772
K-2 Total	212	199	207	205	210	213	190	193	180	194	191	198	198
3-5 Total	237	222	210	206	196	185	194	193	204	182	184	173	186
6-8 Total	239	240	240	224	218	203	198	183	176	185	184	194	173
9-12 Total	354	310	302	273	284	294	262	266	249	229	225	207	215
Notes: 2018-19 to 2022-23 births are the average of the five previous years. Consequently, from 2018-19 to 2021-22 the early grade estimates are quite speculative.													

As is apparent from the above table, K-12 enrollment has declined considerably over the past six years (1,042 in 2010-11 to 895 in 2015-16; -147 students/-14.1%) and is projected to continue to decline through 2022-23 (-123 students/-13.7%). The majority of the enrollment reduction will occur at the middle and high school levels while the two elementary schools will remain relative steady.

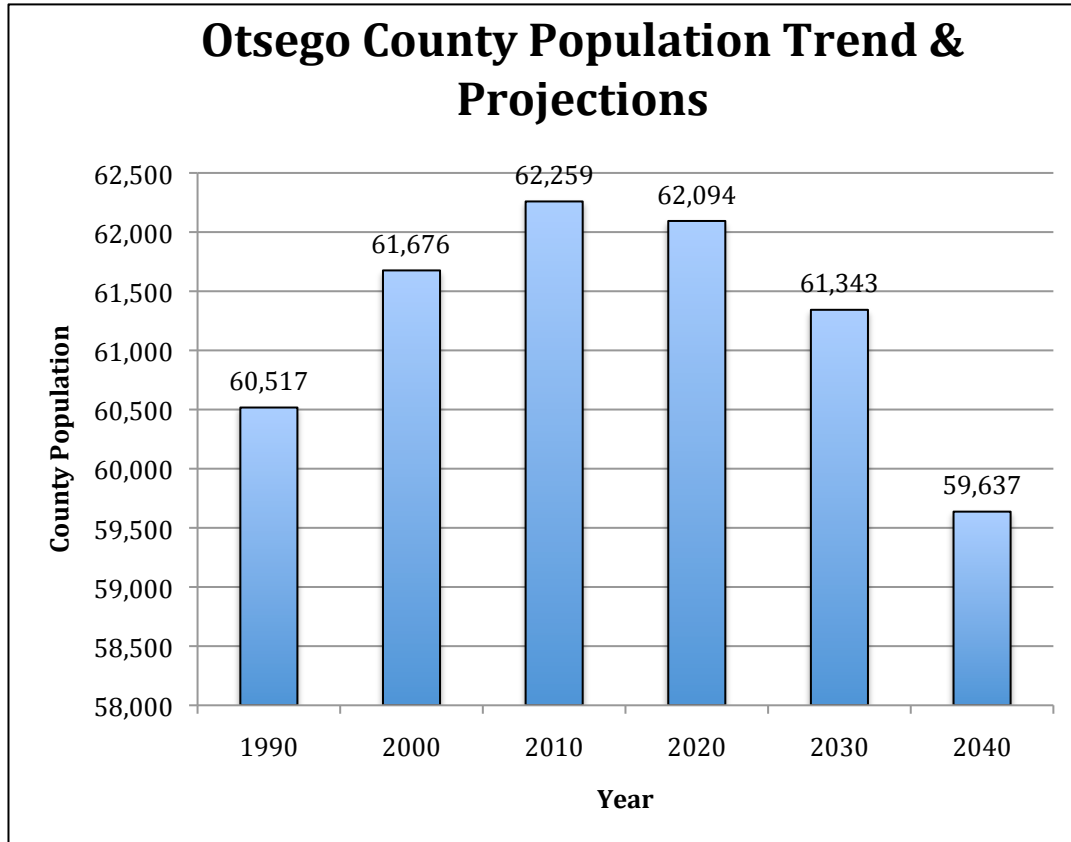


The recent decline in school district enrollment and the projected decline in future school district enrollment is not surprising in considering the overall Otsego County population trends. As the graph below shows, the total county population increased from 2000 to 2005 then began to decline slowly but steadily.



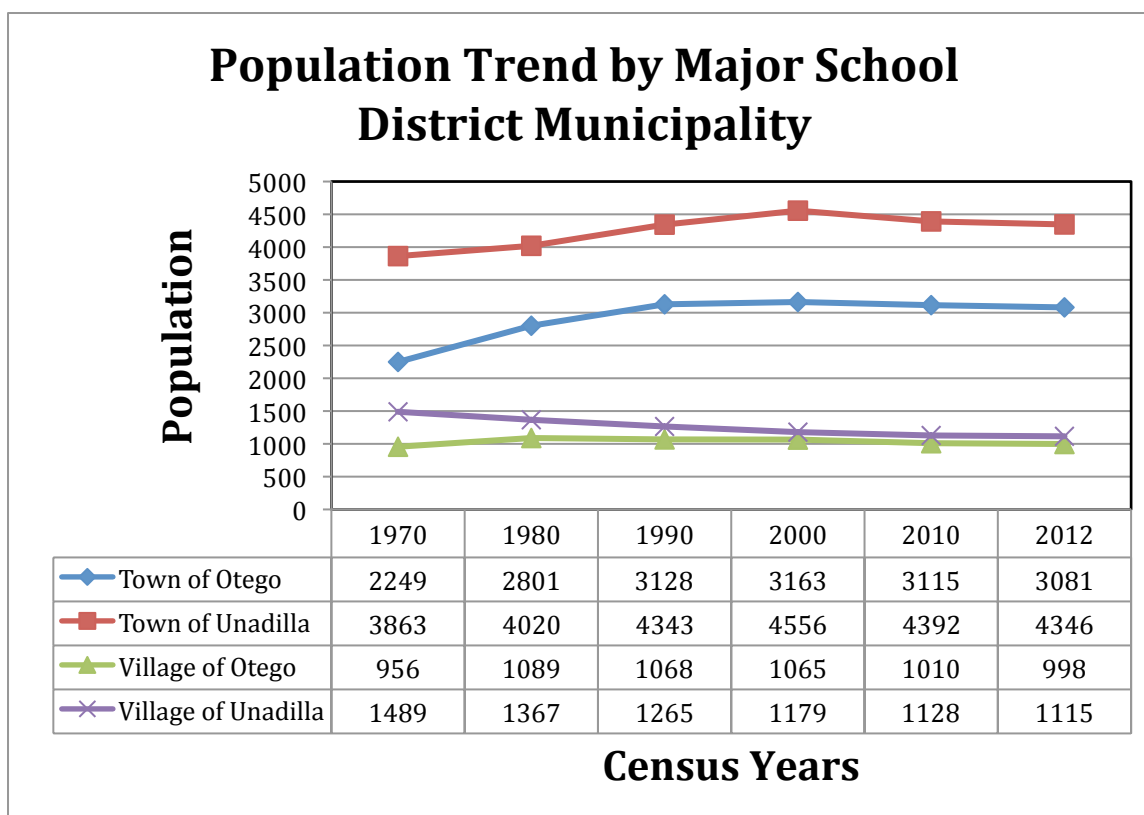
Graph 1: Otsego County Population Trend

Additionally, as the following graph 2 shows, the recent decline in overall county population is projected to continue, perhaps even more so than shown in Graph 1. The above actual numbers show that between 2010 and 2014 the overall county population is declining more rapidly than the projections would indicate in graph 2.

**Graph 2: Otsego County Total Population Trend and Projection to 2040**

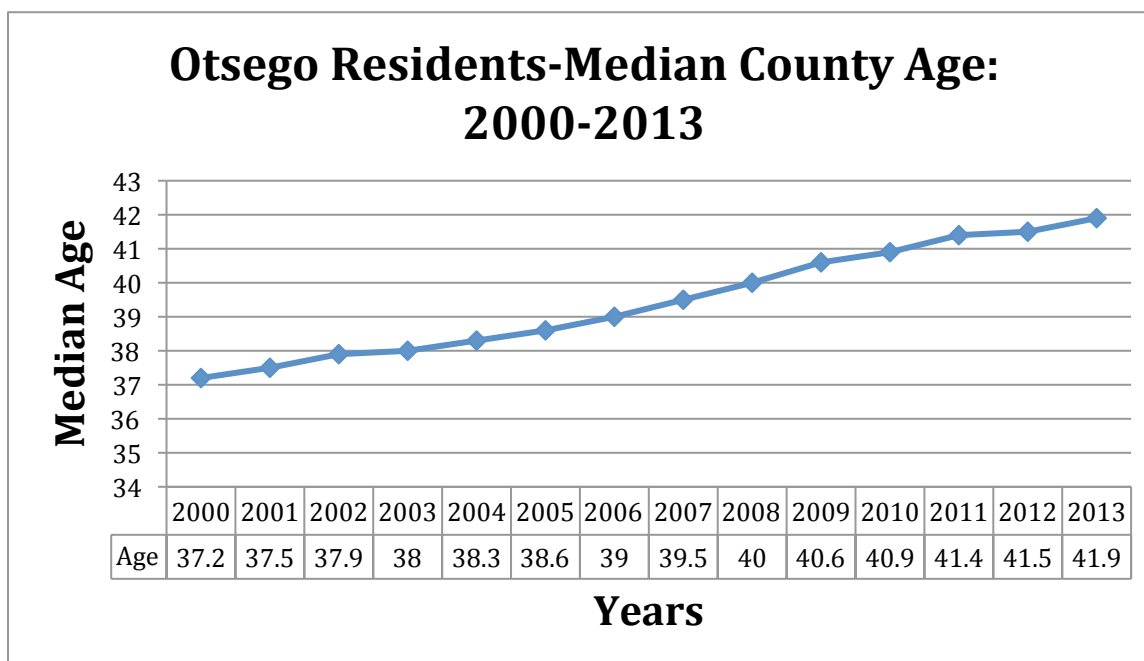
Examining recent trends at the sub-county level, it is instructive to study the population trends in the major towns of Otego and Unadilla and the villages of Otego and Unadilla for they comprise nearly all the tax base of the school district. The following graph represents a view from the 1970 U.S. census through 2012 (the 2012 figures are estimates at this time). All four municipalities have experienced a slight dip in population between 2000 and 2012. These trends mirror that of the county as a whole.

It is instructive to study the population trends in the major towns of Otego and Unadilla, and the Villages of Otego and Unadilla for they comprise nearly the tax base of the school district

**Graph 3: Population Trend-Towns & Villages in School District**

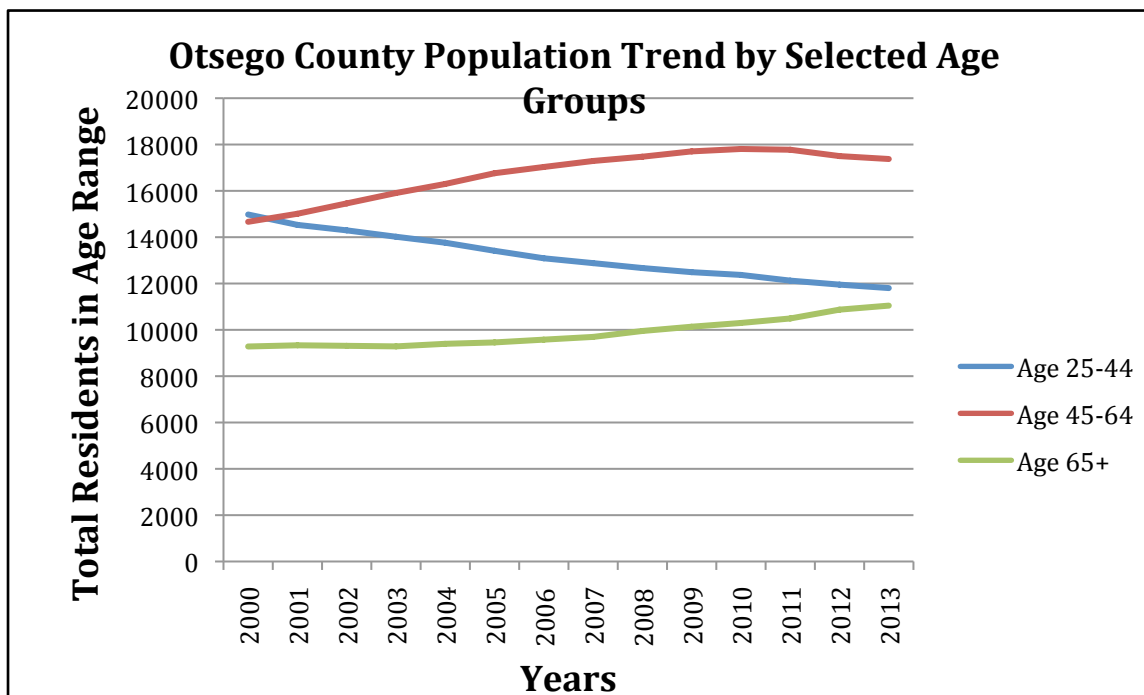
It is important to also examine the median age of Otsego County residents for this provides some insight into future school enrollments. Populations that are aging generally mean that there is likely an out-migration of younger residents, hence fewer families that likely will have children entering the school system. In upstate New York, it is very common to find most communities that are experiencing this type of out migration and hence aging local populations.

Graph 4 below presents the trend in Otsego County's resident median age. Spanning 2000 to 2013 we can see that the median age of county residents rose from 37.2 to 41.9—a four year and seven month increase. Clearly the county population is aging.

**Graph 4: Median Age of Otsego County Residents 2000-2013**

Lastly, it is also important to examine the cohort of adults in various age ranges. Adults in the childbearing age are typically 25-44 years of age. This is the cohort of adults who are most likely to have children, a factor that would influence the number of children being educated in the school district. As the graph below illustrates, the number of Otsego County residents in this critical age range has been declining over the past 13 years while at the same time county residents in the 45-64 and 65+ age ranges have been increasing consistently. This indicates a trend that does not bode well for the Unatego Central School District's future enrollment.

The number of Otsego County residents in the 25-44 age range has been declining for the past thirteen years. As members of this age group are typically of childbearing age, this trend does not bode well for future school enrollments in Unatego

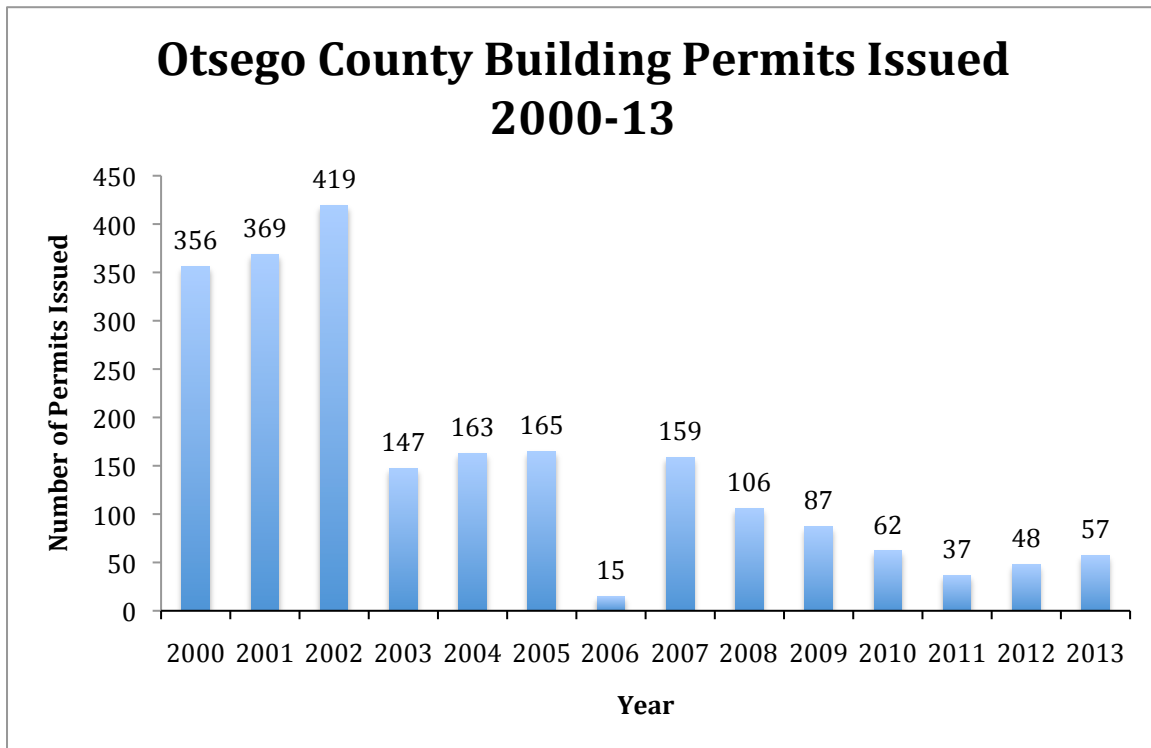
**Graph 5: Otsego County Population by Age 25-44 Cohort-2000-2013**

We also examine the overall housing stock in a community to determine if building is occurring. The chart that follows shows the trend in building permits (not just homes) in Otsego County from 2000 to 2013. As is evident, from 2006 to 2013 the number of building permits issued has declined quite significantly. Although the number of building permits issued annually fluctuates quite a bit from year to year, the overall trend is quite clear—there has been a sharp decline in permits issued since 2002. This decline is representative of a geographic area that is not growing in population or economic activity.

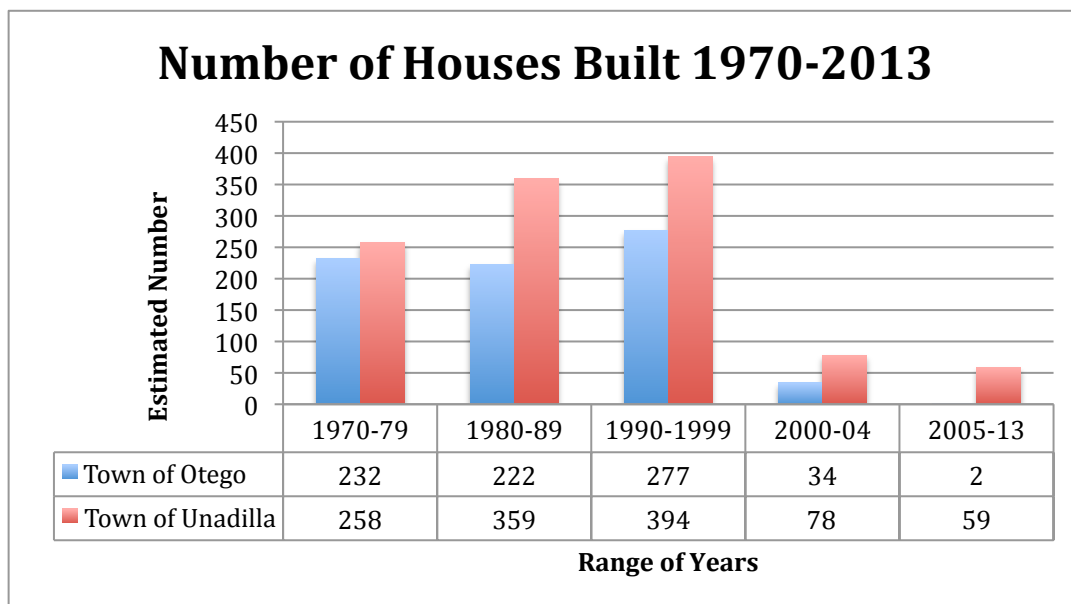
It is very clear however, that in nearly every instance, municipalities issue many more building permits than actual structures (homes and commercial businesses) erected. Therefore, for school enrollment purposes, we also explore whether the area housing stock is increasing or not for an increasing number of housing starts is indicative of a growing area. Graph 7 summarizes the number of houses actually built in the towns of Otego and Unadilla from 1970 to 2013. Consistent with all other data, it is clear that fewer homes have been constructed in both municipalities in recent years.



Graph 6: Trend in Number of Building Permits Issued in Otsego County



Graph 7: Number of Houses Built in the Towns of Otsego and Unadilla-1970-2013





Another variable that occasionally can result in school enrollment fluctuation is the number of students that are home schooled by parents. In some regions of New York State these numbers are significant and growing. Consequently it is important to examine the trend locally in these numbers. The table that follows shows the number of students that have been/are home schooled in Unatego from 2011-12 to the present year. It is quite clear that these numbers are relatively small and stable. Consequently, we see no need in making adjustments to our enrollment projections as previously shown as a result of the number of home schooled students.

Table 5.3 Number of Resident Students Home Schooled 2011-12 to 2015-16	
School Year	Number
2011-12	26
2012-13	31
2013-14	30
2014-15	32
2015-16	22

**The district averages
about 28 students each
year that are home
schooled**

Occasionally districts have sizeable numbers of non-resident students that attend district schools either on a tuition basis established by Board policy or due to contractual agreements with various district bargaining units. Unatego currently has a Board policy that permits some non-resident students to attend district schools if certain conditions are met such as “there is sufficient space to accommodate...” and “no increase in size of faculty or staff will be necessary.” The tuition rate is based on the New York State formula commonly known as the Seneca Falls formula. The Board policy also permits non-resident students to attend district schools on a tuition free basis if they are the children of families that have signed a contract to buy or build a residence in the school district and will enroll that semester, foreign students who are living with district residents, students whose families move from the district during the school year, and others at the discretion of the Board. In a few instances these non-resident students attending district schools can be quite large in number and, if the Board policy changes, can significantly impact student enrollments. In 2014-15, there were 9 students that were tuition eligible and in 2015-16, there are only 4 students. Therefore it is apparent that even if Board policy changes, this would have little impact on enrollments in the district.



Two other possible variables that occasionally cause enrollment projections to be adjusted include resident students that go to school in nearby other public schools (last year the district had 22 of these students at Afton, Charlotte Valley, Franklin, Gilbertsville-Mt. Upton, and Sidney) and resident students that attend non-public schools (last year the district had only 8 at Oneonta Community). In both cases, we do not believe we need to make adjustments to our enrollment projections for there is not indication that these students will be returning to Unatego due to other district policy changes or closure of private schools.



CHAPTER 6

BUILDING ORGANIZATION

Since this study focuses on a possible grade and/or building reconfiguration, the current utilization of district buildings is studied. It is first important to examine how the schools are being used this academic year, and to gauge how enrollments may impact them in the future.

Table 6.1 provides an overview of the district's schools.

Table 6.1 Overview of School Buildings			
Schools	Otego Elementary	Unadilla Elementary	Middle/High School
Address	353 Main Street Otego, NY 13825	265 Main Street Unadilla, NY 13849	2641 Highway 7 Otego, NY 13825
Year of Original Building	1933	1935	1967
Sq. Ft. in Current Building	34,196	63,458	139,910
Number of Floors	2	2	2
Grades Housed	K-2	3-5	6-12
Students Served	213	185	497
Architect	BCK-IBI Group		
NOTES: All information was taken from the NYS Building Conditions Survey completed in 2010 except the enrollments that were drawn from the 2014-15 academic year.			

In addition to an overview of each of the district's buildings, it is also important to determine how each of the buildings is being utilized. Table 6.2 that follows shows the grade alignment by building

Table 6.2	
2015-16 Grade Configuration by Building	
Building	Grade Levels
Otego Elementary	K-2
Unadilla Elementary	3-5
Unatego Middle/High School	6-12

At the current time, the district does not operate a universal pre-K program. From all accounts, the program is not offered simply because of the cost of implementation. The district has submitted a grant to fund a full day pre-K program for 18 four-year old students. The amount of the grant proposal is \$87,607 for the program to run for a half year. Should the district ever



secure the funding, it is anticipated that the pre-K program would be started requiring an additional classroom in the primary building.

Given the capacity of the buildings involved in this study, the consultants then determined the current use of the regular classrooms with respect to class sizes and numbers of sections at each grade level. This analysis produced the following table for the elementary school grades.

Table 6.3 Class Sizes-2015-16		
Grade	Number of Sections and Class Size of Each Section	Average Class Size
K	15,14,13,15,13	14.0
1	22, 22, 22	22.0
2	19, 19, 19, 19	19.0
3	19, 20, 20	19.7
4	20, 20, 20	20.0
5	20, 20, 20	20.0

It is important to understand the impact of table 6.3 above with respect to the way that the current grades are configured. Unatego is currently organized on what is called the Princeton Plan. This plan eliminates the use of geographic district lines to assign students to schools and instead puts all of the same-age children together. As a result, all of the K-2 students attend Otego and all of the 3-5 students attend Unadilla regardless of where they reside. This approach is the most cost effective way to structure the elementary grades. For example, Unatego has 66 students in first grade. Under the current Princeton Plan, the district is able to have three classrooms of 22 students each. If the elementary grades were organized by geography, it can be assumed that 33 first graders would go to Otego and 33 first graders would go to Unadilla. Since the district would probably not want 33 students in each first grade section, the district would, in all probability, have sections of 16 and 17 in Otego and sections of 16 and 17 in Unadilla. This would mean that the district would have four sections of first grade instead of the current three sections. This extra section would require the hiring of an additional teacher, perhaps the hiring of an additional paraprofessional, and the use of an additional classroom. Applying this example to all of the elementary grades, it is easy to see why the district has implemented the current structure and the cost efficiencies that have resulted.



As different grade level configurations are considered, it is important to understand the thinking behind grade level organization. It is clear that most school districts consider reorganization due to changes in available space and that virtually any grade configuration can be found somewhere. The most common grade configuration pattern in New York State is K-5, 6-8, 9-12. Over the past 30 years there has been a shift from the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 grade pattern to a K-5, 6-8, 9-12 arrangement due to the emergence of the middle school movement. However, given all the options that exist, researchers agree there is no “one best way” to arrange the grades. “What” a district does with the grade configuration, not “which” grade configuration is used, is what determines student success.

In addition to the grade alignment by building, it is important to determine how each of the district’s current buildings is currently being utilized. Table 6.4 that follows shows the current year utilization of the Otego Elementary School.

Table 6.4 Otego Elementary School Classroom Usage 2015-16 (Includes Gym, Cafeteria, Library, Music Room, & Art Room)				
School Building	No. of Full-Size Rooms	Grade Level Classrooms (12)	Other Usage of Full-Size Rooms (9)	Usage of Small Rooms, Not Full-Size, Other Than Administration
Otego Elementary	21	K-5 1-3 2-4	Special Ed-8:1:1 Sp Ed Resource-Movement Room-1 Special Ed AIS-1 Grade 1 AIS-1 Grade 2 AIS-1 Computer Room-1 OT/PT-1 Speech/ESL/Storage-1 Faculty Room-1	Health Office DSS Counselor

Table 6.4 shows that, of the 21 full size classrooms in the building, 12 are used for regular grade-level classrooms and 9 others are used for related classroom functions and a faculty room. Based on this analysis of the space and based on the building tour that was



conducted as part of the committee meeting process, it is generally agreed that there is little to no extra room in the Otego Elementary School.

Table 6.5 that follows shows how the space in the Unadilla Elementary School is currently being used.

Table 6.5 Unadilla Elementary School Classroom Usage 2015-16 (Includes Gym, Large Multi-Purpose Room, Cafeteria, Library, Music Room, & Art Room)				
School Building	No. of Full-Size Rooms	Grade Level Classrooms (9)	Other Usage of Full-Size Rooms (17)	Usage of Small Rooms, Not Full-Size, Other Than Administration
Otego Elementary	26	3-3 4-3 5-3	Special Ed Resource-2 Physical Therapy-1 Occupational Therapy-1 Computer Lab-1 Study Hall-1 Empty-2 Faculty Room-1 AIS-3 LTA-4 Book Room-1	Conference-1 Work Room-1 Speech-1 Lounge-1 Music Lessons-1 Primary Library-1 Padded Room-1

As can be seen from table 6.5, there are 26 full size classrooms but only 9 of them are being used for regular grade level classrooms. There are six other classrooms that are being used for related instructional services and a faculty room; however, there are two empty classrooms, one study hall, 3 AIS rooms, and four rooms for teaching assistants. In many instances, full size classrooms are being used for small group instruction, simply because the room is available. This is not at all an unusual occurrence since it is very common for people to occupy vacant space. However, it is not the most efficient use of the space. Given this data and the tour of the building that was conducted as part of the committee process, it is clear that there is a significant amount of underutilized and vacant space in the Unadilla Elementary School.

The Unatego Middle/High School is located on Route 7 approximately halfway between the villages of Unadilla and Otego. Table 6.6 that follows shows how the space in the middle/high school is currently being used.



Table 6.6 Middle/High High School Classroom Usage 2015-16 (Includes 3 Gyms, Cafeteria, Auditorium, Library, 2 Music Rooms, 2 Art Rooms & the District Offices)				
School Building	No. Full-Size Rooms	Core Academic Classrooms (30)	Other Usage of Full-Size Rooms (23)	Usage of Small Rooms, Not Full-Size, Other Than Administration
Middle/High School	53	English-7 Soc. Studies-6 Math-6 Science-8 Spanish-3	Special Ed-6:1:1-1 Special Ed Resource-6 Business-2 Computer Lab-3 Health-1 Family/Consumer Science-1 Tech Shop-1 Testing Center-1 Computer Storage-1 Board Room-1 Faculty Room-1 Empty-4	Weight Room-1 Nurse-1 Tech-1 Lunch Detention-1

Table 6.6 above shows that 30 of the 53 full size classrooms are used for core academic classrooms. In addition, another ten classrooms are used for related academic instruction and a faculty room, while there are four empty classrooms, a boardroom, a computer storage room, a testing center, and six full size classrooms that are being used as resource rooms. Once again, we see a school building with an abundance of space due to underutilized and vacant rooms and six resource rooms that could be located in much smaller rooms that currently occupy full size classrooms. This excess space was also confirmed in the tour of the facility that was provided for the advisory committee.

Another method for measuring the effective utilization of the middle/high school is to look at the use of the major rooms on a period-by-period basis. Table 6.7 that follows shows that analysis.



Table 6.7
High School & Middle School Room Utilization-2015-16

Room #	Use	# of Periods/Day Occupied
61	Tech Shop	4
62	Tech	3
63	Lunch Detention	3
64	Middle School Art	2
72	High School Art	4
76	Empty-Faculty Room	
82	Family & Consumer Science	6
83	Science	7
86	Social Studies/Reading	7
88	Special Ed Resource	5
89	English	7
90	Math	7
93	Empty-Board Room	
94	Computer Lab	3
101	Math	7
102	Science	6
103	Science	6
105	Spanish	6
108	Computer Storage	
110	English	6
111	Empty	
112	Empty	
113	Social Studies	6
116	Math	6
117	Special Ed Resource	5
118	Social Studies	6
119	Special Ed-6:1:1	7
120	English	7
122	Special Ed Resource	3
123	Spanish	6
131	Health	7
204	Math	6
205	Empty	
206	English	7
207	Social Studies	6
208	Social Studies	6
209	English	6
210	Biology	9
212	Biology	7
214	Chemistry	7
218	Physics	7
220	Earth Science	7
224	Computer Lab	3
225	Business	4
226	Empty	
227	Business	6
228	Special Ed Resource	4
229	Special Ed Resource	8
230	Testing Center	9
231	Special Ed Resource	4
235	English	5
242	English	6
244	Social Studies	7
245	Spanish	7
246	Empty	
247	Math	6
248	Math	6
	TOTAL % USAGE (49 CLASSROOMS)	64.4% (5.8/DAY)



Table 6.7 shows that 57 classrooms were studied. On average, the 49 classrooms that are used for classes are used 5.8 periods per day out of a 9 period day. No school can ever schedule its facility so that it is used 100% of the time. However, an average usage rating of 64.4% clearly demonstrates that even those rooms that are being used for classrooms are not being utilized to their maximum efficiency.

As the district considers options for organizing its schools, understanding the current utility costs for each building is important. Table 6.8 that follows shows the 2014-15 utility costs for each of the district's three school buildings.

Table 6.8 2014-15 Utility Costs			
	Otego Elementary	Unadilla Elementary	Middle/High School
Electric-NYSEG	\$12,853	\$18,030	\$38,154
Electric-Direct Energy	\$14,863	\$26,166	\$52,778
Heating Fuel-Reinhardt	\$59,001		\$163,997
Propane-Mirabito		\$55,735	\$5,891
Water-Villages	\$933	\$1,409	
TOTAL	\$87,650	\$101,340	\$260,820

In considering the possible closure of one of the elementary schools, it is important to calculate the utility cost savings that might accrue to the district. It is assumed that the district will maintain ownership of the closed school, will not be renting the facility, and will be responsible for the cost of the utilities for the closed building. Assuming that the district maintains ownership of the closed building, it will be necessary to continue the utility costs so that the building remains in good repair. As a rule, it is estimated that savings of 40% will accrue to the district when comparing an open building versus a closed building. Given this assumption, the district could expect to save utility costs of \$35,060 (40% of \$87,650) if Otego Elementary were to close and \$40,536 (40% of \$101,340) if Unadilla Elementary were to close.

In addition to space utilization, another important aspect for determining future facility use is the overall physical condition of the buildings themselves. The New York State Education Department requires all school districts to conduct a Building Condition Survey every five years. The surveys for all school districts are required to be updated in 2015. The following tables



summarize the improvements and related estimated cost for each of Unatego's schools and the bus garage.

Table 6.9 2015 Building Condition Survey Otego Elementary (1931) 34,196 Square Feet	
Item	Cost
Replace septic system *	\$625,000
Replace pavement	241,000
Replace some sidewalk panels	15,000
Replace pavement in play area	23,000
Update athletic/play fields	125,000
Replace sections of fence	27,000
Repair foundation	47,000
Repoint exterior wall *	457,000
Repair chimney	13,000
Repair exterior steps at cafeteria	13,000
Replace 1998 roof	275,000
Replace floor tile	141,000
Replace terrazzo floors	232,000
Refinish stage floor	25,000
Replace ceilings *	551,000
Replace interior doors and frames	113,000
Provide rated stair enclosures	250,000
Provide backflow plumbing preventer	5,000
Provide mixing valves for hot water heaters	13,000
Upgrade water cooler service	4,000
Provide boiler backflow preventer	3,000
Install classroom exhaust system	25,000
Provide CO detection system	3,000
ADA accessibility parking upgrades	188,000
ADA accessibility *	557,000
Replace lighting *	25,000
Upgrade communications system *	94,000
Upgrade fire alarm system *	110,000
TOTAL COST	\$4,200,000
* Indicates highest priority ranking	



Table 6.10
2015 Building Condition Survey
Unadilla Elementary (1934)
67,400 Square Feet

Item	Cost
Replace septic system *	\$688,000
Replace pavement	235,000
Replace sidewalks *	61,000
Replace asphalt play area	55,000
Masonry restoration on foundation	57,000
Replace wall joints on exterior wall columns	54,000
Replace chimney and repoint masonry	19,000
Replace wall caps and re-flash roofing on parapet *	68,000
Exterior stair access replacements	52,000
Refinish interior wall paneling	13,000
Replace tile flooring	80,000
Replace hard flooring	275,000
Refinish stage flooring	25,000
Replace ceilings *	357,000
Replace lockers	65,000
Replace interior doors	225,000
Provide arc flash study	9,000
Upgrade lighting	263,000
Upgrade plumbing system	386,000
Upgrade plumbing fixtures *	37,000
Add AV units & CO detection	11,000
Replace cabinetry	50,000
ADA accessibility upgrades *	260,000
Upgrade fire alarm system *	111,000
Upgrade communications systems *	169,000
Provide are of rescue *	5,000
Electric upgrades *	116,000
TOTAL COST	\$3,721,000
* Indicates highest priority ranking	



Table 6.11
2015 Building Condition Survey
Middle/High School (1967)
139,910 Square Feet

Item	Cost
Replace pavement	\$651,000
Repair foundation	7,000
Repoint exterior walls	19,000
Repair masonry	13,000
Replace loading dock *	25,000
Replace glass block	5,000
Replace roof on 1998 wing	916,000
Replace wood corridor paneling	188,000
Replace tile flooring	42,000
Refinish stage flooring *	13,000
Replace ceilings *	755,000
Replace lockers	175,000
Replace interior doors	303,000
Replace stair railings	17,000
Replace plumbing valves	7,000
Replace boilers	378,000
Upgrade cooling/AC generating systems	20,000
Replace HVAC equipment *	1,101,000
Replace piping *	1,127,000
Replace ductwork *	738,000
Replace control system	563,000
Provide CO detection	12,000
Music/band room acoustic upgrades	44,000
Corridor ventilation	75,000
Refinish library shelving	13,000
Accessibility upgrades	108,000
Upgrade interior electrical distribution *	275,000
Upgrade communications system *	220,000
Replace fire alarm system *	200,000
TOTAL COST	\$8,010,000
* Indicates highest priority ranking	



Table 6.12 2015 Building Condition Survey Bus Garage (1950) 5,860 Square Feet	
Item	Cost
Fuel tank upgrades	\$40,000
Replace fence sections	22,000
Replace cap on chimney	2,000
Replace overhead doors *	90,000
Replace windows	19,000
Replace aged interior doors	6,000
Replace non-GFI receptacles	5,000
Water piping upgrades	44,000
Upgrade fire alarm and CO detectors *	7,000
ADA Accessibility *	35,000
Accessibility upgrades	47,000
TOTAL COST	\$317,000
* Indicates highest priority ranking	

Table 6.13 that follows shows the amount of potential expenses identified by the building condition survey for each facility'

Table 6.13 Cost of Improvements from Building 2015 Condition Survey			
Building	BCS Cost of Improvements	Number of Square Feet	Cost/Square Foot
Otego Elementary	\$4,200,000	34,196	\$122.82
Unadilla Elementary	\$3,721,000	67,400	\$55.21
Middle/High School	\$8,010,000	139,910	\$57.25
Bus Garage	\$317,000	5,860	\$54.10

Not all of the items listed on the building condition survey are critical. On the other hand, there are numerous items associated with each of the buildings that require attention in the very near future and other items that are nearing the end of their useful life. It is just a matter of time before some of these matters become major worries and major sources of significant expense. Central to the question of this study is the determination of the amount of money that is going to continue to be spent to maintain school buildings that were built in the 1930's.



CHAPTER 7

STAFFING, TRANSPORTATION, AND FINANCE

Staffing

Education is a people intensive business. It is quite common for 65-70% of any school district budget to be spent on employee salaries and benefits. For this reason, any discussion about having schools operate more efficiently must include a discussion about the staffing levels of the district.

Unatego, like nearly all other school districts in New York State, has experienced severe financial challenges over the past eight years. Because such a significant portion of the school district budget is devoted to staff salaries and benefits, Unatego has reduced positions in order to deal with its fiscal challenges. The following table identifies the cuts in positions that have been made since 2011.

Table 7.1 Position Cuts Made Since 2011-12	
Year	Cuts
2011	1.0 Special Education Teacher 1.0 Art Teacher 1.0 Psychologist 1.0 Administrator
2012	5.0 Elementary Education Teachers 1.0 Psychologist 1.0 Technology Teacher 1.0 Elementary Principal.....Create 1.0 K-2 Principal/ CSE Chair 9.0 Teacher Aides

One of the options that is being considered in this facilities study is the possible closure of one of the district's elementary schools. Should the district decide to close one of the elementary schools, significant costs in the area of staffing could be realized. Table 7.2 that follows shows possible staff savings if one of the elementary schools were to close. The savings would be the same regardless of which elementary school were to close.



Table 7.2	
Possible Staff Savings by Closing One Elementary School	
Principal	\$80,000
Secretary	\$25,000
Registered nurse	\$30,000
Computer Lab LTA	\$20,000
Music Teacher	\$55,000
PE Teacher (.5)	\$28,000
Custodial (1.5)	\$33,000
Cafeteria	\$15,000
SALARY TOTAL	\$286,000
+37% Fringe	\$105,820
TOTAL	\$391,820

Staff savings raise a number of complicated issues. Generally speaking, districts are reluctant to involuntarily reduce staff. Rather, districts often prefer to realize staff reductions as a result of attrition. Should Unatego choose that option, the staff savings identified in Table 7.2 would still be realized but rather than having the savings be immediate, the savings would accrue over time as staff leaves the district and is not replaced.

Transportation

Like most upstate, rural districts, Unatego transports many children to school on a daily basis. The district employs a single trip daily routing plan to get in-district students to and from school. This means all students in grades K-12 ride the same bus each way. There are 10 in-district runs daily that transport students to and from the two elementary schools and the middle/high school. The earliest bus pickup is approximately 6:40 a.m.

All buses arrive at either the Unadilla or Otego elementary schools. After the K-2 students exit, many students arriving on the five buses at the Otego school transfer to other buses. Three of these buses take students to the middle/high school while two buses take the grade 3-5 students to Unadilla Elementary. All K-12 students that arrive at the Unadilla school remain on the bus after the grade 3-5 students exit and are driven to the middle/high school where the grade 6-12 students exit. The grade K-2 students then continue on to the Otego Elementary School.



In addition to these regular in-district bus runs, each day Unatego sends one bus to Springbrook, one bus to the Norwich BOCES campus, four buses to the Harold BOCES campus, and one bus to the Oneonta Community Christian School.

Finance

Effective management of finances is an important requirement of any school district. It is particularly important in a challenging national and state economy as we have seen over the past six or seven years. Fortunately, prudent financial management of the Unatego Central School District has been a hallmark for many years.

One important measure of a Board of Education's ability to find the balance between the quality of education that the community wants for its children with the community's ability to support this education is the annual school district budget vote. The following table summarizes the results from school district budget votes from 2006 to 2015. As can be seen and mentioned earlier in this report, the budget has passed every year shown.

Table 7.3 District Budget Vote History			
Year	Yes Votes	No Votes	Total Votes
2015	215	74	289
2014	161	59	220
2013	196	82	278
2012	434	187	621
2011	216	102	318
2010	215	172	387
2009	205	73	278
2008	233	106	339
2007	374	151	525
2006	372	168	540

A second window into the district's current fiscal situation is through examining the current general fund balance sheet. At the end of each fiscal year (June 30th), all school districts have to file a year-end financial report. The following table shows Unatego's general fund balance sheet from this report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015.



Table 7.4	
District Balance Sheets as of June 30, 2015	
ASSETS	
Cash – Unrestricted	\$794,085
Cash-Restricted	\$240,332
Accounts receivable	\$0
Due from other funds	\$1,997,596
Due from State and Federal	\$870,355
Due from other governments	\$0
Total Assets	\$3,902,368
LIABILITIES	
Accounts Payable	\$83,508
Accrued Liabilities	\$81,789
Revenue Anticipation Notes Payable	\$900,000
Due to other funds	\$110,907
Due to employees' retirement system	\$85,102
Due to teachers' retirement system	\$1,066,511
Deferred Revenue	\$0
Total Liabilities/Deferred Revenues	\$2,327,817
FUND BALANCE	
Restricted Fund Balance	
Workers' Compensation Reserve	\$0
Unemployment Reserve	\$0
Reserve for Retirement Contributions	\$0
Reserve for Liability Claims	\$0
Reserve for Tax Certiorari	\$0
Reserve for Employee Benefits & Accrued Liabilities	\$240,332
Total Restricted Fund Balance	\$240,332
Assigned Fund Balance	
Assigned Appropriated Fund Balance	\$1,000,000
Assigned Unappropriated Fund Balance*	\$53,494
Total Assigned Fund Balance	\$1,053,494
Unassigned Fund Balance	
Unassigned Fund Balance	\$280,725
Total Unassigned Fund Balance	\$280,725
*Includes encumbrances that are not reported in Committed and Restricted Fund Balance.	

To assess the district's overall fiscal position, it is important to focus on several items in the above general fund balance sheet. Specifically, the number and amount of reserve accounts in the restricted fund balance is an indicator of long-range fiscal planning. As can be seen, on June 30, 2015 the district only had \$240,000 in reserves for employee benefits and accrued liabilities. This does not position the district well for future costs such as workers compensation claims, earned retirement payments, potential liability settlements, or to settle tax certiorari



(assessment challenges) claims. Compared to most districts, the restricted fund balance is very low.

A second indicator of fiscal health is the amount of unassigned fund balance a district maintains. State law restricts a school district to carrying no more than 4% of the subsequent year's budget in its unassigned fund balance. At the end of the last fiscal year, Unatego only had \$280,000 set aside or 1.26% of this year's general fund budget (\$22,114,446). This is exceptionally low.

Third, we examine the amount of money a school district uses to hold down the tax rate each year; that is, money the district has in hand at the end of the previous year that it applies to the revenue side of the ledger for the coming year. From the 2014-15 general fund budget, Unatego applied \$1,000,000 to hold the tax rate down. If it had not done so, the district would have had to raise this additional revenue from the local taxpayers to support the 2015-16 school year operation. The end result however is that the district will again have to have at least \$1,000,000 excess revenue next year to do the same procedure or the local residents will have to make up any difference that is short of this amount.

In summary, from our analysis we have concluded the district is in very poor fiscal condition as of June 2015. This opinion is shared by the New York State Comptrollers office in its January 2015 report, based on 2014 data, that indicated Unatego was a district in "moderate fiscal stress" (see Appendix A) and in its January 2016 Report of Examination on the district's fiscal condition (see separate document). The New York State Comptroller's Office concluded in its January 2016 report that "if the decline in fund balance continues, the District's financial stability could become a concern. Recurring revenues are not sufficient to finance recurring expenditures." All indicators point to the very precarious financial condition of the Unatego school district.



CHAPTER 8

RESEARCH AND LITERATURE ON GRADE REORGANIZATION

Before the feasible options are presented, a brief overview of the relevant research and literature that were fundamental to the study is presented. Grade configuration study is common for school districts around the country; thus substantial research and literature exist. Key research findings were presented to the advisory committee. The Appendix contains a more in-depth summary of the research.

First, it is important to note that most school districts that embark on grade configuration study do so because of too much or too little capacity in their schools. In other words, space rather than educational considerations drives the decision. Unatego is the exception. It approached the study of grade configurations with one primary purpose in mind—how the district can arrange the K-12 schools to achieve more positive educational outcomes for students while balancing the community’s ability to financially support any new grade/facility arrangement. The Unatego Board of Education and Superintendent are to be commended for addressing grade configuration for the right reason.

Examination of school districts around the country finds virtually any possible grade configuration. For example, a K-4, 5-8, 9-12 pattern is common in suburban school districts. Some districts like Unatego have adopted a grade center plan, with all K-2 students in one building and all 3-5 students in another. The K-8, 9-12 grade arrangement is still found in many small rural districts and is a recent trend in the urban areas. The oldest grade configuration is K-12, and is still seen in many small rural districts, even in New York State. The most common pattern of organizing grades in New York State today is K-5, 6-8, 9-12.

Over the past thirty years there has been a trend by districts to change from the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 configuration to K-5, 6-8, 9-12. The impetus for this large scale and pervasive shift has been due to what is commonly known as “the middle school movement.” The middle school movement is an effort to provide a transition phase of schooling—taking children from the cloistered setting of an elementary school to the less structured environment of a high school. Middle school age children have unique needs during this rapidly changing phase of life that may not be adequately addressed in either the typical elementary school or high school.



Unfortunately, school district planners cannot look to the research for the “one best way” to configure the grades. While there is evidence that one can locate to support any grade configuration, there is no conclusive research that indicates that one alignment is necessarily any better than another. A general conclusion that most researchers have reached is that it is “what” a district does with the grade configuration that ultimately determines success or failure, rather than “which” grade arrangement is endorsed. For example, many districts that changed their grade configuration to either a 5-8 or 6-8 middle school never adopted the philosophy and necessary practices to have a true middle school (for example, team teaching, advisor-advisee programs). Consequently, these districts have been unsuccessful in achieving the positive outcomes advanced by middle school advocates.

Finally, the research indicates that school districts studying grade configuration typically must confront a set of common issues. Indeed, some of these surfaced as this study progressed. Specifically, the cost and length of travel for children to get to and from school; how long will students be on the school bus is always a concern that must be addressed if a reconfiguration is to occur. The favorable or unfavorable impact of parent involvement in a child’s schooling is an element that arises in every instance. The manner in which students will be grouped for instruction (i.e., teaming at the middle school level) is a frequent issue.

Research has found that the number of transitions during a student’s K-12 experience should be considered. Each time a student moves from one school to another the educational process is disrupted. Although the student recovers, it is important to minimize the number of transitions in a student’s education.

Interaction between various age groups and the influence of older students on younger is usually a significant consideration for districts considering reconfiguration. How will fifth or sixth graders be impacted by proximity to eighth graders?

And finally, the relationship of a building’s design for accommodating the instructional program of different grade configurations must be examined. This, too, was a focus of advisory committee consideration.



CHAPTER 9

OPTIONS FOR MAINTAINING AND/OR RECONFIGURING THE BUILDING/GRADE ORGANIZATION OF THE DISTRICT

When evaluating the current status of Unatego's grade and facility organization, the consultants first attempted to identify "feasible" options—in other words, how *could* the grades/facilities be arranged. Following this, the next step was to identify the "desirable" options—among the feasible ways, what is/are the option(s) that make the most educational and fiscal sense. Following is a discussion of the "feasible" options with advantages and disadvantages of each followed by the consultants' selection of the "desirable" options.

Feasible Grade/Facility Options

The consultants identified several feasible options along with advantages (pros) and disadvantages (cons) of each when compared to the other possible choices. These options were then the focus of discussion with members of the advisory committee. The advisory committee was asked to critique the options, either agree or disagree with the options, and critique the pros and cons. The advisory committee was also asked to add additional advantages and disadvantages to each option. Finally, the advisory committee was also asked to add any additional options that they thought would be appropriate. The following tables show the result of these discussions. In addition, supplemental data to support many of the pros and cons has been included.

Option 1

Remaining as is, that is, keeping the schools and grades organized as at present, is always an option. Therefore, this was the first possible future option shared with the committee. As can be seen in the accompanying table, some of the major advantages the consultants and the committee noted included keeping everyone happy and avoiding community turmoil over any change. Also, given projected declining enrollment and current space in the schools, this option would permit adding pre-kindergarten if it comes available. Finally, the district would not have to deal with one or more empty school buildings as considered in the other options. On the other



hand, the committee identified several disadvantages to maintaining the existing arrangement. These included the inefficient use of space in the schools, no financial savings would be realized as with the other options being considered, and instructional time is lost due to the shuttle transportation system currently in use. The following table 9.1 shows a complete list of advantages and disadvantages associated with option 1.

Table 9.1 Option 1: Remaining As Is (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12)	
<u>Pros</u>	<u>Cons</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *will not create turmoil (no disruption): keeps everyone happy * <i>fifth grade can remain where they have recess</i> *<i>fifth grade would not be mixed in with high school students; keeps age groups separate</i> *<i>Pre-K can be housed at Unadilla</i> *<i>don't have to deal with maintaining an empty building</i> *<i>room for growth</i> *<i>maintains property values in village "desirability"</i> *<i>maintains enrollment by keeping families in the district who may consider leaving due to changes</i> *<i>needs of age groups are being met</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *inefficient use of space in the schools *does not offer any financial savings *<i>if nothing changes now, nothing will change</i> *<i>instructional time is lost at the end of each day for busing</i> *<i>annual repair costs</i> *<i>future costs are unpredictable</i>
NOTE: Regular text indicates initial thoughts of the consultants while <i>italics</i> represent additions made from discussion of the Advisory Committee members.	

Option 2

A second option presented by the consultants and discussed by the advisory committee members was to close the Otego Elementary School, have the Unadilla building hold all students in grades K-4, and move the fifth grade to the middle school. While the following table contains the complete list of pros and cons that were generated, some of the major advantages included making better use of excess capacity in the schools, achieving considerable financial savings, providing more opportunities for teachers to collaborate, saving parents with elementary students from having to go to multiple elementary schools for concerts and parent meetings, and eliminating the shuttle bus system thereby increasing instructional time.



Table 9.2 Option 2: Close Otego Elementary School, Make Unadilla K-4, Move 5th Grade to the Middle School	
<u>Pros</u>	<u>Cons</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *makes much better use of space *offers considerable financial savings <i>*no shuttle buses like we have now so instructional impact won't be great like it is now; improves transportation overall</i> <i>*more opportunities for teachers to collaborate</i> <i>*more accommodating for parents not to have multiple elementary buildings</i> <i>*more opportunity for student interactions among grade levels (buddy reading, writing, etc.)</i> <i>*easy for service provider schedules (i.e., counselors)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *backlash due to emotional attachment to the Otego Elementary School. *K-2 students from the Otego Elementary School would have to ride the bus longer *there would likely be some staff members that would lose jobs <i>*fifth grade is too young for our current building set-up at MS/HS; maturity level of students; how did moving 6th grade to the middle school work?</i> <i>*after school program—those families that live in Otego will have to travel to Unadilla to pickup students</i> <i>*loss of room for growth</i> <i>*question of impact on home values of taxpayers and therefore loss of tax revenue to school district; desirability for home buyers and maybe lose families to other districts</i> <i>*Unadilla floods</i> <i>*cost of perhaps relocating the bus garage</i> <i>*lack of extra gym and field space</i> <i>*more difficulty scheduling specials, lunches, etc.</i> <i>*lessens possibility of PK</i> <i>*less space for tier groups and accommodating test mods</i>
NOTE: Regular text indicates initial thoughts of the consultants while <i>italics</i> represent additions made from discussion of the advisory committee members.	

As school districts all over New York State look to optimize student programming with limited resources, consolidation of services and staff reductions are options that are often chosen. Since sixty five to seventy percent of most school district budgets are devoted to paying staff salaries and fringe benefits, significant savings can only be realized by reducing staff. If staff reductions, either through lay offs or through attrition, are inevitable, districts generally want to



make changes by reducing their instructional program only as a last resort. In consideration of Option 2 staff savings by closing one elementary school are summarized in the following table (these amounts are based on 2015-16 data). Of course, if the district were to choose this option the Board may well decide to reduce staff through attrition rather than cause some employees to lose their jobs. Table 9.3 that follows shows the staff savings that could be realized should the district decide to close one of the elementary schools.

Table 9.3 Possible Staff Savings by Going to 1 Elementary School	
Principal	\$80,000
Secretary	\$25,000
Registered nurse	\$30,000
Computer Lab LTA	\$20,000
Music Teacher	\$55,000
PE Teacher (.5)	\$28,000
Custodial (1.5)	\$33,000
Cafeteria	\$15,000
SALARY TOTAL	\$286,000
+37% Fringe	\$105,820
TOTAL	\$391,820

In addition to financial savings due to staffing efficiency, Option 2 would also provide some financial benefit due to reduced utility costs associated with closing the Otego Elementary School. The table below summarizes the utility costs for all three district schools during the 2014-15 school year. As can be seen, the Otego Elementary school's total was \$87,650. After conferring with the district's architects, it is estimated that a closed building would likely yield approximately 40% savings in utility costs, or about \$35,060 per year if the Otego building is closed.

Table 9.4 2014-15 Utility Costs			
	Otego Elementary	Unadilla Elementary	Middle/High School
Electric-NYSEG	12,853	18,030	38,154
Electric-Direct Energy	14,863	26,166	52,778
Heating Fuel-Reinhardt	59,001		163,997
Propane-Mirabito		55,735	5,891
Water-Villages	933	1,409	
TOTAL	\$87,650	\$101,340	\$260,820



Finally, as it relates to cost estimates due to implementing this option, a bus routing plan was developed that would cost the district approximately an additional \$1,800 per year (after transportation aid is received). Table 9.5 that follows summarizes the cost for this option as well as for routing plans for all three options under consideration.

Table 9.5			
Comparison of Impact on Transportation for All Options			
Criterion	Feasible Options		
	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
No. of Student on the Bus over 60 minutes		A.M.=19 P.M.=36	A.M.=19 P.M.=24
Driving time cost per year	\$663,300	\$681,300	\$643,476
Difference in cost/year routes	Same	+\$18,000/year	-\$19,824/year
Additional buses needed	None	None	None
Additional drivers needed	None	One	One
Additional cost after state transportation aid	None	Approximately +\$1,800/year	Approximately -\$1,982/year
Student wait time for other students to arrive	Same	Less	Less
Notes: The following assumptions were used in designing routes and arriving at the above observations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current students were used to design routes ▪ Student drop off location at the end of the day are the same as at present 			

It is important to note that the major stumbling block to implementing this option from a transportation perspective is in finding the additional drivers needed since the district struggles to hire and maintain enough bus drivers currently. It is also significant in light of discussion by the committee that with this option the transportation plan would reduce, but not eliminate, the amount of time students wait for other students to arrive at school, thus increasing instructional time. This wasted instructional time could be reduced by perhaps 50%.

Significant disadvantages of this option noted in the table included the backlash due to the emotional attachment to the Otego Elementary School. In addition, there could be some staff members that might lose their jobs. Also, families living in Otego would have to travel to Unadilla to pick up their elementary children from the after school programs. Finally there would be a possible loss of room for growth of program.

One of the major discussion points by the committee was whether closing the Otego Elementary School would adversely impact local property values. To explore this issue, the



consultants reviewed the professional literature regarding the closing of a school and its impact on home values and the research on any link between a school district reputation and home values (see Appendix B for a summary of this literature review). After reviewing the literature, the consultants concluded that Otego Village property values *could* be negatively impacted because the elementary school children would be attending school further from their home. On the other hand, the research indicates that there is a strong positive correlation between a school district reputation and home values—the better the district’s reputation, the higher the home values. Consequently, if closing the Otego Elementary building results in an improved perception of the quality of the school district, home values *could* be positively impacted. In summary, the consultants have concluded that if the Otego Elementary School (or any school in the district) were to close, it is unclear if local property values would be adversely impacted.

A second window into the possible impact of school closure on local property values was through examining three rural school districts that have recently dealt with the issue of school closures in their communities. The first district, Altmar-Parish-Williamstown in Oswego County, recently closed three elementary schools. The other two districts are Sidney and Gilbertsville-Mt. Upton, both of which border Unatego. Sidney closed elementary schools in Sidney Center and in Masonville after the 2005-06 school year and GMU closed schools in both Gilbertsville and Mt. Upton after a 1990 merger of those two districts and the construction of a new K-12 building in 1994. The following tables illustrate either the assessed or full value of property in the townships surrounding the closed elementary schools in both districts.

Table 9.6 A-P-W Closed Elementary School Townships and Total Assessed Property Value in the Townships Before and After Closing the Elementary Schools				
	Schools			
Year	Altmar	Parish	Williamstown	Total Assessed Value
2007-08	\$71,003,677	\$93,663,049	\$55,530,142	\$220,196,868
2008-09	\$76,149,128	\$93,609,716	\$58,193,389	\$134,342,517
2009-10	\$89,177,362	\$94,497,871	\$65,829,816	\$249,505,049
2010-11	\$89,868,246	\$93,596,737	\$65,879,683	\$249,344,666
2011-12	\$77,210,580	\$117,707,782	\$58,874,237	\$253,792,599
2012-13	\$92,084,907	\$140,318,700	\$66,303,225	\$298,706,832
2013-14	\$89,952,721	\$138,048,935	\$66,526,050	\$294,527,706
2014-15	\$92,978,097	\$141,411,076	\$66,574,411	\$300,963,584
2015-16	\$92,208,868	\$141,727,312	\$67,458,888	\$301,395,068



NOTES: (1) Shaded cells indicate the years prior to school closure
 (2) The Village of Altmar dissolved in 2012

Table 9.7 Sidney Closed Elementary School Townships and Total Full Property Value in the Townships Before and After Closing the Elementary Schools			
Year	Schools		Total Full Value
	Sidney Center	Masonville	
2005-06	\$209,221,400	\$66,435,559	\$275,656,959
2006-07	\$220,668,979	\$67,159,626	\$287,828,605
2007-08	\$240,746,919	\$81,273,627	\$322,020,546
2008-09	\$244,505,811	\$83,694,640	\$328,200,451
2009-10	\$291,626,555	\$85,069,757	\$376,696,312
2010-11	\$287,215,522	\$85,407,851	\$372,623,373
2011-12	\$288,394,869	\$86,381,182	\$374,776,051
2012-13	\$272,879,487	\$79,327,490	\$352,206,977
2013-14	\$256,064,237	\$85,458,041	\$341,522,278
2014-15	\$250,725,145	\$82,652,328	\$333,377,473
2015-16	\$245,705,322	\$82,899,307	\$328,604,629

NOTES: (1) Shaded cells indicate the years prior to school closure

Table 9.8 G-MU Closed Elementary School and Total Assessed Property Value in the Town of Guilford Before and After Closing the Elementary School	
Year	Assessed Property Value
1989	\$18,142,679
1990	\$18,637,522
1991	\$18,504,400
1992	\$18,509,400
1993	\$22,831,950
1994	\$23,108,552
1995	\$23,459,052
2015	\$51,784,896

Notes: (1) The district merger took place in 1990 and the new school opened in 1994

In examining these tables, one can see that local assessed or full property values do not appear to have declined following the closing of the elementary schools in any of the three districts. Of course, this picture is related to the next issue to be discussed.



Although it is not included in the tables above as a possible disadvantage of implementing this option, the committee discussed the issue of what to do with the Otego building if it were closed. Specifically, could the school be sold and put into productive use and perhaps placed on the tax roles? If not, would it simply decay and become a community eyesore? And, if the vacated school is not put to productive use but rather sits idle, would this negatively impact local property values. These are serious concerns and so the consultants identified other districts that had closed elementary schools in their communities.

The first example was that of the Altmar-Parish-Williamstown Central School District in Oswego County. Working with a consulting group from the lower Hudson Valley, the district was fortunate to find buyers for its three shuttered elementary schools. Specifically, the Parish Elementary School sold June 30, 2012 for \$245,000 to become a high tech manufacturing facility. The Altmar School sold on the same date for \$400,000 and has been repurposed as a luxury salmon fishing resort. The Williamstown Elementary School sold in May 2013 for \$55,000 (purpose unknown as of now). The second example is the former school in Mt. Upton that has not been repurposed and sits in significant disrepair in the middle of the village of Mt. Upton. The third example is the Unadilla Valley Central School District which was formed in 1996 as a result of the merger of the New Berlin and South New Berlin Central School Districts. The South New Berlin school was purchased by a private spin off company in the pharmaceutical industry, the New Berlin elementary school was purchased by an area nursing home, and the New Berlin high school was purchased by a private school and is now operating as Milford Academy. The concern about what will happen to school buildings that have been closed is a significant issue for local communities. These examples from three area school districts show that the outcomes can be very positive.....or not so positive!

After sharing the above information with the committee as it pertained to sale price of the elementary schools in the case study districts, the current appraised value of the Unatego school buildings was provided to the committee. The following table 9.9 summarizes the current appraised values.

Table 9.9		
Appraised Value of Unatego School Buildings and Grounds		
<i>Location</i>	<i>Building</i>	<i>Yard and Outside</i>
Otego Elementary School	\$9,053,464	\$65,927
Unadilla Elementary School	\$13,465,274	\$70,154



Unatego Jr-Sr High School	\$36,679,542	\$85,847
Bus Garage	\$641,319	\$11,814
NOTE: These data were provided by the New York State Insurance Reciprocal for the 2015-16 academic year. The yard and outside column does not include other structures such as storage buildings, concession stands, dugouts, etc.		

As can be seen, the Otego Elementary School is currently appraised for \$9,053,464. It is important to note that this appraised value is what is commonly referred to as “replacement value”. That is, if the school were to be completely destroyed, this is the cost to build the structure again. Importantly, however, despite the figures quoted in the table, if the Otego Elementary School is closed, and if the district is fortunate enough to find a buyer for the school, the sale price would not nearly approach the appraised value of the building. See the Altar-Parish-Williamstown school district example and what the district realized from sale of its buildings.

To examine the overall financial impact of option 2 we must first summarize the additional cost savings and increases presented previously. The table that follows illustrates this summary.

Table 9.10 Estimated Financial Impact of Option 2				
Fiscal Year	Object of Expense			
	Staffing	Utilities	Transportation	Total Impact
2017-18	-\$392,000	-\$35,000	+\$1,800	-\$425,200
2018-19	-\$399,840	-\$36,050	+\$1,836	-\$434,054
2019-20	-\$407,837	-\$37,132	+\$1,873	-\$443,096
2020-21	-\$415,994	-\$38,246	+\$1,910	-\$452,330
2021-22	-\$424,314	-\$39,393	+\$1,948	-\$461,759
Assumptions: 1-All staff savings occurs in the first year of implementation; uses 2015-16 salaries for calculating savings to be conservative. 2-Staff salary increases 2.0% per year 3-Utility savings are estimated at 40% per year 4-Utility savings increase by 3.0% per year 5-Transportation loss increases at 2.0% per year 6-All cost estimates in 2017-18 are based on 2015-16 estimates				

The table represents a total financial impact for the first five years following the closing of the Otego Elementary School. Notice the assumptions that all staff positions in this example are assumed to have been eliminated in the first year of the closing and that these salaries are



based upon 2015-16 actual rates to be conservative in our estimates. Also note the other assumptions in the footer of the table. In total, the district would realize approximately \$425,000 in the first year of implementing option 2 with the assumptions given.

Using savings noted above, the following table represents the impact on the full-value tax rate in Unatego for the first five years following implementation. The furthest column to the right compares the estimated full value tax rate comparison between implementing this option or the district choosing to remain as is (option 1). Again, please note the assumptions in the table footer upon which these projections are based. As is evident and expected, there is a full-value tax rate reduction for residents of the district if this version of option 2 is adopted.

Table 9.11 Impact of Financial Savings on Full Value Tax Rate for Option 2					
School Year	Estimated Tax Levy	Estimated General Fund Savings	Tax Levy Less Savings	Full-Value Assessment	Full-Value Tax Rate With/Without Savings
2017-18	\$7,388,018	\$425,200	\$6,962,818	\$338,066,043	\$20.60/\$21.85
2018-19	\$7,535,788	\$434,054	\$7,101,734	\$331,541,369	\$21.42/\$22.73
2019-20	\$7,686,504	\$443,096	\$7,243,408	\$325,142,620	\$22.28/\$23.64
2020-21	\$7,840,234	\$452,330	\$7,387,904	\$318,867,368	\$23.17/\$24.59
2021-22	\$7,997,038	\$461,759	\$7,535,279	\$312,713,228	\$24.10/\$25.57
Assumptions: 1-Estimated tax levy for 2017-18 is 2.0% higher than the current 2015-16 fiscal year (\$7,101,132) for each successive year. 2-Estimated tax levies for 2018-19 through 2021-22 will increase by 2.0% per year. 3-Full-value assessments for calculating the tax rates are based upon the 2015-16 fiscal year full-value assessment of all district property and the average decrease in FV over the past six years (1.93%) for each successive year. 3-The notes General Fund savings are taken from Table 9.11.					

Finally, and primarily because most residents wish to know how implementation of this option or any option might impact their actual tax bill, we present the potential impact in the first year of implementing this version of option 2 in terms of assessed tax rates. As the table that follows illustrates, the owner of a home assessed as \$100,000 in each of the townships that are either all or partially located in the Unatego Central School District would see a tax reduction in 2017-18. One can also easily extrapolate from the above table (which uses full-value tax rates



versus assessed value rates) that an actual reduction in resident tax bills will also be realized in future years.

Table 9.12 2017-18 Estimated Taxes On A \$100,000 Home in Each Township With and Without Fiscal Savings from Option 2			
<i>Township</i>	<i>Taxes-No Savings</i>	<i>Taxes-With Savings</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Franklin	\$2,262.47	\$2,132.26	-\$130.21
Sidney	\$2,543.63	\$2,397.24	-\$146.39
Butternuts	\$1,837.63	\$1,731.87	-\$105.76
Laurens	\$1,886.90	\$1,778.31	-\$108.59
Oneonta	\$2,104.09	\$1,982.99	-\$121.10
Otego	\$1,783.42	\$1,678.82	-\$104.60
Unadilla	\$3,237.06	\$3,050.76	-\$186.30
Assumptions: 1-The assessed property values for each township were those in 2015-16 2-The equalization rates in each town are the same as in 2015-16			

A second analysis is shown in table 9.13 that follows. This example of the financial impact of option 2 is based upon the assumption that all staff positions would be eliminated in the first year of implementation *except the music and physical education positions; these teaching positions are assumed to be reduced in year two (2018-19)*. Again, also notice the other assumptions in the table footer that underpin this analysis.

This table, like the first example discussed, shows that there would be considerable savings in each year starting in 2017-18. However the savings would not be quite as large as in the example where we assumed all staff positions would have been cut in the first year. Specifically, in our first example for 2017-18 the staff savings are estimated to be \$392,000 versus in this example for the same year they are only \$271,260.

Again as in our first example, we present how these savings would impact the full-value tax rate for five years after closing the Otego Elementary School. This is illustrated in table 9.13 that follows.



Table 9.13 Impact of Financial Savings on Full Value Tax Rate for Option 2					
School Year	Estimated Tax Levy	Estimated GF Savings	Tax Levy Less Savings	Full-Value Assessment	Full-Value Tax Rate With/Without Savings
2017-18	\$7,388,018	\$304,460	\$7,083,558	\$338,066,043	\$20.95/\$21.85
2018-19	\$7,535,788	\$426,883	\$7,108,905	\$331,541,369	\$21.44/\$22.73
2019-20	\$7,686,504	\$435,781	\$7,250,723	\$325,142,620	\$22.30/\$23.64
2020-21	\$7,840,234	\$444,869	\$7,395,365	\$318,867,368	\$23.19/\$24.59
2021-22	\$7,997,038	\$454,148	\$7,542,890	\$312,713,228	\$24.12/\$25.57
Assumptions: 1-Estimated tax levy for 2017-18 is 2.0% higher than the current 2015-16 fiscal year (\$7,101,132) for each successive year. 2-Estimated tax levies for 2018-19 through 2021-22 will increase by 2.0% per year. 3-Full-value assessments for calculating the tax rates are based upon the 2015-16 fiscal year full-value assessment of all district property and the average decrease in FV over the past six years (1.93%) for each successive year. 3-The notes General Fund savings are taken from Table 9.11.					

We see in this table that the full-value tax rate will be reduced (but not quite as much as in our first example) for each of the five years following implementation.

Now we again represent how this option with the assumptions given might impact a taxpayer in the first year of the closing by examining table 9.14 using the assessed value tax rates.

Table 9.14 2017-18 Estimated Taxes On A \$100,000 Home in Each Township With and Without Fiscal Savings from Option 2			
<i>Township</i>	<i>Taxes-No Savings</i>	<i>Taxes-With Savings</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Franklin	\$2,262.47	\$2,169.23	-\$93.24
Sidney	\$2,543.63	\$2,438.81	-\$104.82
Butternuts	\$1,837.63	\$1,761.91	-\$75.72
Laurens	\$1,886.90	\$1,809.15	-\$77.75
Oneonta	\$2,104.09	\$2,017.38	-\$86.71
Otego	\$1,783.42	\$1,707.93	-\$75.49
Unadilla	\$3,237.06	\$3,103.66	-\$133.40
Assumptions: 1-The assessed property values for each township were those in 2015-16 2-The equalization rates in each town are the same as in 2015-16			



Again we see that an owner of a home assessed as \$100,000 would realize an actual dollar reduction in their tax bill in 2017-18 once Otego Elementary is taken off line.

The advisory committee proposed an Option 2b that is essentially the same as that discussed above. However, in option 2b, the fifth grade classes would remain in the elementary school as opposed to being housed in the middle school. The primary reason for this variant was a concern that the maturity level of the typical fifth grader is more similar to students in the elementary school than the middle school students. The only possible drawback of this option that was discussed is a concern of possibly not having adequate space for the development and housing of a Pre-Kindergarten program should the district ever secure enough funding to begin such a program. In general however, the overall advantages and disadvantages discussed for Option 2 would also apply to this alternative Option 2b.

In summary, there are some advantages and disadvantages, as well as some unanswered questions, if the Unatego Board of Education chooses this option 2 as the future course of action.

**Options 2 and 2b propose the closing of the
Otego Elementary School and housing
either all K-4 or K-5 students in the
Unadilla Elementary School.**



Option 3

A third feasible option was discussed at length with the advisory committee. This third possibility proposes the closing of both current elementary schools (Otego and Unadilla) and constructing a new K-5 elementary school on the current middle/high school campus. And as with the previous two, a table of pros and cons was created.

Table 9.15 Option 3: Close Both Elementary Schools and Build a New K-5 Elementary School on the Middle/High School Campus	
<u>Pros</u>	<u>Cons</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *would most likely make better use of district space *would ensure an up-to-date elementary school for 21st century learning *transportation would be shorter for some elementary students; <i>bus transferring issue disappear</i> *<i>gaining 20 minutes of instructional time</i> *<i>more accommodating for parents not to have multiple elementary buildings</i> *<i>more opportunity for student interactions among grade levels (buddy reading, writing, etc.)</i> *<i>easy for service provider schedules (i.e., counselors)</i> *<i>No Otego vs. Unadilla—nobody wins; no more Otego vs. Unadilla mentality</i> *<i>there would no longer be flooding concerns</i> *<i>makes it easier to share services between the elementary and MS/HS</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *backlash due to emotional attachment to both the Otego and Unadilla elementary schools *there is a local cost to building a new school (\$18,200,000) *transportation would be longer for some elementary students *<i>empty buildings and what to do with them in both towns</i> *<i>length of time before a new school is built (5 years) and difficulty having to get a proposition passed</i> *<i>bus garage is still at Otego</i> *<i>the parking lot is already an issue at the MS/HS so it would need to be redesigned</i>
NOTE: Regular text indicates initial thoughts of the consultants while <i>italics</i> represent additions made from discussion of the Advisory Committee members.	

Reviewing the advantages and disadvantages in the previous table, many of these are similar to Option 2 (closing just the Otego Elementary School). However, two significant differences are noted—first, the district would have an elementary school that is constructed to provide a 21st century education to local students. Second, there is a considerable cost of constructing a brand new K-5 elementary school on the middle/high school campus.



Should both of the elementary schools be closed and a new elementary school constructed on the middle/high school campus, the district's architects have programmed the new elementary school as shown in the following table 9.16.

Table 9.16 TENTATIVE Building Program-K-5 Elementary School			
Space	Quantity of Rooms	Estimated SF/Room	Estimated Total SF
<i>INSTRUCTIONAL USAGE</i>			
Kindergarten	4	1,100	4,400
Grade 1-5 Classrooms	16	820	13,120
Remedial Classroom	2	500	1,000
Gym	1	5,000	5,000
Art Room	1	1,000	1,000
Computer Room	1	850	850
Special Ed 12:1:1	1	820	820
Special Ed Resource	1	400	400
OT/PT Classroom	1	820	820
Music/Band Room	1	1,200	1,200
<i>SUPPORT USAGE</i>			
Library	1	3,500	3,500
Kitchen	1	1,800	1,800
Cafeteria	1	3,000	3,000
Nurses Office	1	1,000	1,000
Principal's Office	1	180	180
Conference Room	1	250	250
Reception/Secretarial Area	1	800	800
Teachers' Lounge	1	800	800
<i>SHARED USAGE SUBTOTAL</i>			40,640
<i>OTHER SPACE</i>			
Storage	1	1,000	1,000
Mechanical/Electrical	1	1,500	1,500
Circulation/Ancillary Space (20%)			8,100
<i>TOTAL BUILDING SQUARE FOOTAGE</i>			51,240

Assuming a new elementary school of slightly more than 50,000 square feet, the architects have also provided a cost estimate for the new facility that is described in the following table 9.17.



Table 9.17
TENTATIVE Project Cost-New Elementary School

<i>BUILDING</i>	
Building Envelope-52,000 sq ft X \$200/sq ft	\$10,400,000
Equipment/Furnishing	1,500,000
Contingency/Inflation of 10%	1,100,000
<i>BUILDING COSTS</i>	13,000,000
<i>SITE WORK</i>	
Mass Grading	\$300,000
Parking Lot	400,000
Bus Loop	150,000
Sidewalks	75,000
Playground	200,000
Play Fields	100,000
Septic System	250,000
Electric Service	150,000
Well System	100,000
Storm Drainage	200,000
Erosion Control	50,000
Landscaping	25,000
Contingency/Inflation	200,000
<i>SITE COSTS</i>	2,200,000
<i>TOTAL CONSTRUCTION COSTS</i>	15,200,000
<i>INCIDENTALS @ 20%</i>	3,000,000
<i>TOTAL PROJECT COSTS</i>	\$18,200,000

The estimated the cost is approximately \$18-20,000,000 before state aid is returned to the district. The current state building aid ratio in Unatego is 83.9% meaning that the local taxpayer would be liable for a local share of approximately 16% (this is the aid ratio on “approved” costs and may vary depending on what the district wishes to include in the project). It was also determined that there is site space to build such a school on the existing campus immediately behind the current high school parking lot. While this location would interfere with the existing



practice soccer field, it is anticipated that there is sufficient space to create all of the athletic fields that would be needed by the district.

The district's architects were asked to provide a timeline for the construction of this proposed elementary building. While there are a number of factors that have the potential to impact the following schedule, the architect's tentative timeline is shown in table 9.18 that follows.

Table 9.18 Tentative Timeline for Construction of New Elementary School		
Activity	No. of Months	Date
Board makes decision to proceed with the construction of a new elementary school	2-3	June 2016
Board establishes facilities committee to guide planning	2	September 2016
Evaluation of existing site (Addition vs. separate building; impacts on cost; analysis of maximum cost allowance)	2-3	December 2016
Establish building design (Elementary space; secondary space; potential shared space)	1-2	February 2017
Preliminary submission to SED (Confirmation of building aid; enrollment projections; district plan)	3-4	June 2017
Approval by Board of Education	1	July 2017
Communication/input from community	4-5	December 2017
Financial analysis (Capital reserve; debt coming off; maximum cost allowance; fiscal advisor's involvement)	1	January 2018
Set referendum (Referendum language from bond counsel; SEQR; environmental assessment)	3	April 2018
Referendum vote	1	May 2018
Design of school (Schematic drawings; design drawings; construction drawings; hire construction manager)	7-9	February 2019
SED review (Full architectural/engineering review required)	5-8	October 2019
Bidding/awarding of bids	2	December 2019
Construction	18-24	December 2021

Throughout the course of this study, estimates on the amount of time needed to complete construction of a new elementary school have been discussed. For the most part, estimates of 5-7 years have been used, estimates which are consistent with the tentative timeline shown in table 9.18. It is important to remember that this timeline is an estimate at this point in time. There are certainly factors that could make this timeline longer and there are factors that could make this



timeline shorter. However, for planning purposes, this is a good estimate of the time necessary to complete construction of a new elementary school.

Table 9.19 that follows is a financial analysis of implementing this third option. The first table shows the overall financial impact of moving forward in closing both elementary schools and building a new elementary on the current middle/high school site. This table assumes that a new school could be constructed and occupied by 2020-21, all staff positions would be eliminated in the first year of implementation, and that the number and staff positions would be reduced as in option 2. Major differences when comparing options 2 and 3 revolve around utility savings (these savings are now realized from both current elementary schools closing) and increased capital costs due to building a new school (these additional capital costs begin in 2019-20). Also, there is some slight transportation cost difference.

Table 9.19					
Estimated Financial Impact of Option 3					
Fiscal Year Ending 2018	Object of Expense				
	Staffing	Utilities	Transportation	Capital Cost	Total Impact
2017-18	-\$0	-\$0	+\$0	+\$0	+/- \$0
2018-19	-\$0	-\$0	+\$0	+\$0	+/- \$0
2019-20	-\$0	-\$0	+\$0	+\$100,000	+\$100,000
2020-21	-\$432,997	-\$87,567	+\$2,188	+\$267,169	-\$251,207
2021-22	-\$441,456	-\$90,194	+\$2,232	+\$267,969	-\$261,449
Assumptions:					
1-All staff savings occurs in the first year of implementation and a new school could be built by 2020-21					
2-Staff salary increases 2.0% per year with the 2015-16 salaries as a base					
3-Utility savings are estimated at 40% per year					
4-Utility savings increase by 3.0% per year and are based on 2015-16 estimates					
5-Transportation loss increases at 2.0% per year and uses 2015-16 as a base loss					
6-All cost estimates in 2017-18 are based on 2015-16 estimates					

A major increase in capital construction cost repayment beginning in 2019-20 and staff and utility savings do not kick in until the next year. So in 2019-20 the district would have to come up with an extra \$100,000 to pay the local share of principal and interest on the new borrowed money. However, beginning in 2020-21 when the current elementary schools are closed, savings begin to more than offset the additional capital cost. The next question to be answered is how will this net savings impact the full-value tax rate of the district. The table that follows illustrates this impact.



Table 9.20 tells us that there will be a tax benefit in each of the five years following the Board's decision to close both elementary schools and build a new elementary school. As can be seen, there is no impact in 2017-18 or 2018-19 because the schools are not closed nor is the new elementary school finished and occupied. However, beginning in 2019-20 principal and interest repayment begins so in the first year the full-value tax rate is higher. Starting in 2020-21 the tax rate is lower than it might otherwise be due to the salary, fringe benefit, and utility savings.

Table 9.20					
Impact of Financial Savings on Full Value Tax Rate for Option 3					
School Year	Estimated Tax Levy	Estimated GF Savings	Tax Levy Less Savings	Full-Value Assessment	Full-Value Tax Rate With/Without Savings
2017-18	\$7,388,018	-\$0	\$7,388,018	\$338,066,043	\$21.85
2018-19	\$7,535,788	-\$0	\$7,535,788	\$331,541,369	\$22.73
2019-20	\$7,686,504	+\$100,000	\$7,786,504	\$325,142,620	\$23.94/\$23.64
2020-21	\$7,840,234	-\$251,207	\$7,589,027	\$318,867,368	\$23.79/\$24.59
2021-22	\$7,997,038	-\$239,217	\$7,757,821	\$312,713,228	\$24.81/\$25.57
Assumptions: 1-Estimated tax levy for 2017-18 is 2.0% higher than the current 2015-16 fiscal year (\$7,101,132) for each successive year. 2-Estimated tax levies for 2018-19 through 2021-22 will increase by 2.0% per year. 3-Full-value assessments for calculating the tax rates are based upon the 2015-16 fiscal year full-value assessment of all district property and the average decrease in FV over the past six years (1.93%) for each successive year.					

Lastly, we present the first year impact on a homeowner with a house assessed at \$100,000 in each township. As the table that follows illustrates, there would be a real dollar reduction in one's tax bill regardless of where one lives in the school district. However, it is important to keep in mind that in the first year of this option a new school is not yet constructed and therefore the district has not yet begun to repay borrowed money. That being said however, as the previous table that uses the impact on the full-value tax rate in the district, it is apparent that the local tax bill will go down for all residents even after the new principal and interest payments begin starting in 2020-21.



Table 9.21 2020-21 Estimated Taxes On A \$100,000 Home in Each Township With and Without Fiscal Savings from Option 3			
<i>Township</i>	<i>Taxes-No Savings</i>	<i>Taxes-With Savings</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Franklin	\$2,401	\$2,324	-\$77
Sidney	\$2,699	\$2,613	-\$86
Butternuts	\$1,950	\$1,888	-\$62
Laurens	\$2,002	\$1,938	-\$64
Oneonta	\$2,232	\$2,161	-\$71
Otego	\$1,890	\$1,830	-\$60
Unadilla	\$3,435	\$3,325	-\$110
Assumptions: 1-The assessed property values for each township were those in 2015-16 since there has been little percentage change up or down in any of the townships over the past five years. 2-The equalization rates in each town are the same as in 2015-16			

In summary, if option 3 (closing both current elementary schools and building a new elementary school on the central campus) is adopted and fully implemented in 2017-18 there will be enough financial savings in utility costs and staff savings to offset any additional tax rate increases at least for the first five years following the closing of the two schools. Looking out past the first five years, it is important to see how the additional capital debt from building this new school would impact the amount of revenue the district would have to raise to repay all principal and interest. To see this, the following table includes the current debt the district already has on its books plus additional repayment of new principal and interest from borrowing to build the new school.

The new capital debt assumed because of the new elementary school would not start to be repaid until 2019-20, thus providing the Board of Education an opportunity to possibly fund a capital reserve between 2015-16 and 2018-19 without raising taxes. To accomplish this, the Board would take any reduction in the local share of principal and interest payments between 2016-17 and 2018-19 (an amount up to \$276,774) and fund a capital reserve fund. This would not impact the tax levy in either of the years and could be used to help pay for the new capital debt that will have to start being repaid in 2019-20.



Table 9.22
Debt Service Analysis

Year Ending	P&I	Local Share @ 17%	Add to Capital Fund	Local Share of New Debt	Total Local Share
2016	\$3,011,581	\$511,969		\$0	\$511,969
2017	\$2,564,663	\$435,993	\$75,976	\$0	\$435,993
2018	\$2,567,100	\$436,407	-\$414	\$0	\$436,407
2019	\$2,274,900	\$386,733	\$125,236	\$0	\$386,733
2020	\$2,273,100	\$386,427		\$100,000	\$486,427
2021	\$2,290,650	\$389,411		\$267,169	\$656,580
2022	\$2,278,700	\$387,379		\$267,969	\$655,348
2023	\$2,298,200	\$390,694		\$268,169	\$658,863
2024	\$1,357,700	\$230,809		\$267,769	\$498,578
2025	\$1,332,350	\$226,500		\$266,769	\$493,269
Total			\$276,774		

Assuming the positions that could be reduced are in fact eliminated in 2020-21, the district would save approximately \$432,997. This would more than cover the additional local share of principal and interest the district would assume that year. And, while the additional capital debt repayment schedule covers a 30-year period, the elimination of these positions is also a recurring savings each year from that point forward. It would even be possible if some of these positions were reduced to cover these additional principal and interest payments.

In conclusion, if the Board chooses to implement this option there will clearly be significant capital debt taken on because of building a new elementary school. However, with prudent planning, the district could financially afford to cover the cost of the additional debt service without negatively impacting local taxes.

Option 4

At the final advisory committee meeting, the committee decided to add a fourth option to the study. Option 4 is defined as: Close Unadilla Elementary School, make Otego K-4, move 5th grade to the middle school. This option 4 is really the same as option 2 except that Unadilla Elementary School would be closed and Otego Elementary School would remain open as the district's one elementary school. The financial and staffing impact would be the same for option 4 as for option 2. The only major difference to be considered is whether or not Otego Elementary School is large enough to add grades 3 and 4 to the building.



Both of the elementary schools were constructed in the mid 1930's. Otego Elementary has 34,196 square feet and Unadilla Elementary has 63,458 square feet. Of the 21 full size classrooms in Otego, 12 are used for regular grade-level classrooms and 9 others are used for related classroom functions and a faculty room. Based on this analysis of the space and based on the building tour that was conducted as part of the committee meeting process, it is generally agreed that there is little to no extra room in the Otego Elementary School.

There are 26 full size classrooms in Unadilla but only 9 of them are being used for regular grade level classrooms. There are six other classrooms that are being used for related instructional services and a faculty room; however, there are two empty classrooms, one study hall, 3 AIS rooms, and four rooms for teaching assistants. In many instances, full size classrooms are being used for small group instruction, simply because the room is available. Given this data and the tour of the building that was conducted as part of the committee process, it is clear that there is a significant amount of underutilized and vacant space in the Unadilla Elementary School.

Both option 2 and option 4 call for the 5th grade to be moved to the middle school. In addition, they both call for one elementary school in the districts that would house grades K-4. Otego Elementary School currently houses grades K-2 and has little to no extra room. There are currently three sections of third grade and three sections of fourth grade meaning that, at a minimum, there would have to be six vacant classrooms in Otego Elementary School to house the third and fourth grades. These classrooms simply do not exist. In addition, there is not sufficient auxiliary space in Otego Elementary to house the additional students from Unadilla Elementary. Finally, should the district decide to keep the 5th grade in the elementary school, there is no room to do that in Otego Elementary School.

There are currently five sections of kindergarten, three sections of first grade, and four sections of second grade in Otego Elementary that would have to be moved to Unadilla Elementary under option 2 if Otego Elementary School were to be closed. An analysis of the current building usage, the tour of the building with the committee, and moving the fifth grade to the middle school would provide more than sufficient space in Unadilla Elementary School to house grades K-2 that are currently located in Otego Elementary.



CHAPTER 10

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In a study such as this, consideration must be given to several school related factors. These include student enrollment history and projections, instructional programs, staffing, student transportation, facilities, finances, and the emotions associated with the possibility of realigning school buildings. While hard data, such as numbers, facilities, and grade configurations contribute significant facts to study findings, it is important to recognize that emotions contribute as well. The fabric of schools and communities is directly related to the emotional connection people have with them. These emotions are as much “fact” as are hard data. Accordingly, our recommendations are made with mindful consideration of all the facts associated with the study process.

Key Findings

The following are key study findings.

Finding 1: District enrollments have been declining and are projected to continue to decline. This is consistent with other demographic indicators regarding the area in general.

Finding 2: Considering all schools in the district and in light of declining enrollments, there is excess capacity for housing more students than is currently being used. This excess capacity is primarily at the Unadilla Elementary School, and the middle/high school.

Finding 3: The current district grade level pattern (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12) is one of the most common found in schools today for the middle grades. However, researchers agree there is no “one best way” to organize the grades that improves student learning.

Finding 4: The district’s current transportation plan to get students to and from school uses a shuttle system and, as a result, there is a considerable loss of instructional time due to this shuttle system.

Finding 5: Although the community consistently supports the school budget put forward by the Board of Education, the district is in very poor financial condition.



Finding 6: The most recent (2015) building conditions survey indicate it would take \$3,721,000 at Unadilla Elementary School, \$4,200,000 at Otego Elementary School, \$8,010,000 at the middle/high school, and \$317,000 at the bus garage to implement all the recommended changes.

Finding 7: The architects estimate it would cost approximately \$18-20,000,000 if the district chose to build a new elementary school and house all the grade K-5 students in this new building.

Finding 8: The closing of any school in the district may or may not impact housing values in the area. Research is inconsistent on this topic and from at least three cases examined, it does seem to have adversely impacted local assessed or full property values.

Finding 9: If the district chooses to close any school it is highly unlikely it would be able to sell the building at a price anywhere near the appraised value of the school.

Finding 10: Although the district has made a number of recent staff cuts, if the district did close one of its elementary schools, this would create more staffing efficiencies and save the district approximately \$392,000 recurring each year.

Finding 11: Closing one elementary school would also result in approximately \$35-40,000 in annual utility savings.

Finding 12: The district's outstanding debt service will be paid off after 2025. Over the repayment period remaining, the district could use some of the reduced principal and interest amounts each year to add to a capital reserve fund to pay off new debt.

Finding 13: To implement either option 2 or 3 that the committee has discussed would result in negligible impact on transportation cost. However, the district would need to find additional bus drivers.

Finding 14: There would be a tax benefit for all residents if Otego Elementary School were closed and all K-4 elementary students attend the Unadilla school with the 5th graders moving to the middle school.

Finding 15: If the district chooses to close both elementary schools and build a new elementary school, there would be increased capital debt starting in 2020. However, with prudent fiscal planning, this additional debt service would not necessarily adversely impact local taxes.



Conclusions

With these findings in mind, the following conclusions—or answers to the key questions that focused this study—have been reached.

- *Is there a better way....educationally and fiscally....to reconfigure the grades to provide a sound instructional program now and in the future?*
- *If so, how should the grades and facilities be arranged?*

The consultants have concluded that there is a better way educationally and fiscally to reconfigure the grades to provide a sound instructional program. While several “feasible” options were explored in depth, only one provides maximum fiscal benefits while at the same time enhancing the educational environment for local area students.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that, effective with the 2017-18 school year:
 - a. The Otego Elementary School should be closed;
 - b. Grades K-2 should be moved from the Otego Elementary School to the Unadilla Elementary School;
2. It is further recommended that, upon closing the Otego Elementary School, the school district should implement the staffing savings identified in this study using attrition.
3. It is further recommended that the district secure voter approval to establish a capital reserve account at its earliest convenience.
4. It is further recommended that the district fund its capital reserve account with the monies that are saved from the staffing reductions in #2 above, with any reductions in the district’s debt service (\$75,976 in 2016-17, \$414 in 2017-18, and \$49,674 in 2018-19), and any other surplus funds that are generated at the end of the fiscal year.
5. It is further recommended that the district convene a facilities planning committee whose role it will be to develop a long term facilities plan for the district including the design of a new elementary school to be located on the middle/high school campus.



6. It is further recommended that the Unadilla Elementary School be closed in the same year that the new elementary school is ready for use.
7. It is further recommended that the district should immediately explore the possible sale and/or leasing of the Otego Elementary School and for the Unadilla Elementary School at a time that the elementary school is ready for use.
8. It is further recommended that the 5th grade remain in the Unadilla Elementary School. Given that the number of elementary grade sections may change in the future, should the district receive funding and be in a position of establishing a Pre-K program, decisions about the location of the Pre-K program and the 5th grade should be made at that time.



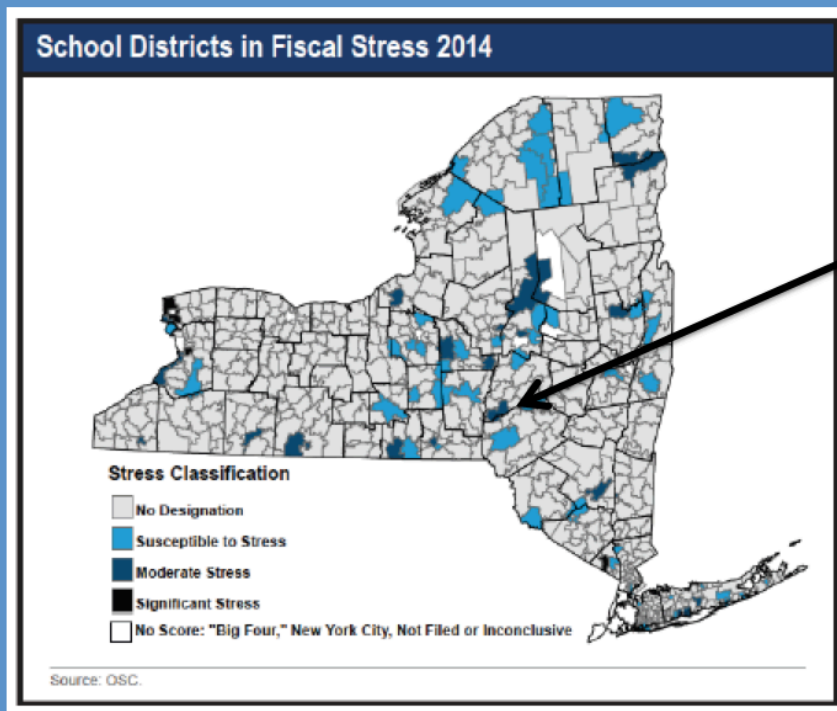
APPENDIX



Appendix A

New York State Comptroller's Report of January 2015 on school districts in fiscal stress based on 2014 district data.

The District is in "Moderate" Fiscal Stress



Unatego Central
School District



Appendix B

Survey of Research Related to School Closure and Impact on Property Values

- Bogart, W.T., & Cromwell, Brian (2000). *How much is a neighborhood school worth?* Journal of Urban Economics.
- Colwell, P., & Guntermann, K. (18=984). *The value of neighborhood schools*. Economics of Education Review.
- Duncombe, W., & Yinger, J. (May 2010). *What recent research reveals about expected financial savings when small districts merge*. The School Administrator.
- 2008 National Association of Realtors Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers.
<http://www.tourthenewrealtor.com/library/fg307?tourthenewrealtor>
- Hendon, W. (1973). *Property values, schools, and park-school combinations.* Land Economics, 49, 216-218.
- CEOs for Cities (2009). *How walkability raises home values in the U.S. cities*.
<http://www.ceosforcities.org/work/walkingthewalk>
- Kwame, O.E., Espey, M., & Huiyan. (2007). *Does close count? School proximity, school quality and residential property values*. Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics, 39 (1).
- Kwame, O.E., & Espey, M. (1993). *School quality and property values in Greenville, South Carolina*. Clemson University, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, Working Papers # 18809.
- Beta Biostatistics, Inc. (2007). *The relationship between residential property sale price and distance from public schools in the Oshkosh Region*. http://www.betabiostat.com/OASD_HV.pdf
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- Black, S. E. (1999). *Do better schools matter? Parental valuation of elementary education*. Quarterly Journal of Economics.
- Hayes, K. J., & Taylor, L. L. (1996). *Neighborhood school characteristics: What signals quality to homebuyers?*



Survey of Research on School Quality and Property Values

- Corsini, K. (April 6, 2011). *Do Schools Really Affect Property Values?*
<https://www.biggerpockets.com/renewsblog/2011/04/06/school-districts-real-estate-prices/>
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- Li, M. M., & Brown, H. J. (1980). *Micro-neighborhood externalities and hedonic housing prices*. Land Economics. 125-140.
- Chin, H.C., & Foong, K. W. (September 2006). *Influence of School Accessibility on Housing Values*. Journal of Urban Planning and Development.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238179814_Influence_of_School_Accessibility_on_Housing_Values
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- Rosen, H. S., & Fullerton, D. J. (1977). *A note on local tax rates, public benefit levels, and property values*. The Journal of Political Economy 85.2 . 433-440.
- Jud, G. D. (1985). *A further note on schools and housing values*. Real estate economics 13.4: 452-462.
- Jud, G. D., & Watts, J. M. (1981). *Schools and housing values*. Land Economics 57.3 (1981): 459-470.
- Hayes, K. J., & Taylor, L. L. (1996). *Neighborhood school characteristics: What signals quality to homebuyers?*. Economic Review-Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas: 2-9.
- Black, S. E. (1999). *Do better schools matter? Parental valuation of elementary education*. The Quarterly Journal of Economics 114.2: 577-599.
- Downes, T. A., & Zabel, J. E. (2002). *The impact of school characteristics on house prices: Chicago 1987-1991*. Journal of Urban Economics 52.1:1-25.
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- Chiodo, A. J., Hernandez-Murillo, R., & Owyang, M. T. (2010). *Nonlinear effects of school quality on house prices*. Federal Reserve Bank of St.Louis Review 92.3: 185-204.



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Appendix C: Minutes from Advisory Committee Meetings



MEMORANDUM

TO: Unatego Facilities Study Advisory Committee
FROM: Alan Pole and Bill Silky
RE: Meeting Notes-Meeting of October 15, 2015
DATE: October 17, 2015

Attendance:

Committee Members: Terry Brown, Jeanne Butler, Heather Coleman, Ron Decker, Ed Frazier, Scott Garno, Kim Gascon, Patti Hoyt, Katie James, Lew Keyser, Ernie Kroll, Elaine Lowe, Katherine Mazourek, Kelly Poje, Melanie Ruff, Fran Secor, and Kim Trask

Consultants: Alan Pole and Bill Silky

Observers: Maureen Haehnel, Kathy Knox, Ruth Modinger, Robert Knox, Tyler Post, Ed Horan, Allison Collins, Kelly Wilde, Kelli Hafele, Angela Flavell, Vicki Beames, Winifred Slawson, Barbara Stanton, Annette Holbrook, Dick Downey, J. McDermott, Stuart Anderson, Glenn Seroka, and Jean Seroka

Location: Unatego Junior-Senior High School

1. Superintendent Dave Richards was ill and was not able to attend the meeting. In his absence, middle school principal Patti Hoyt welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the study consultants. After the consultants provided their backgrounds, committee members were asked to introduce themselves and discuss their connection with the school district.

2. Alan Pole reviewed the purpose of the study that is to answer the following question:

Is there a better way....educationally and fiscally....to use the existing schools and to provide a sound instructional program now and in the future? If so, how should the facilities best be used?

3. Meetings of the Advisory Committee will be held from 6:30-8:30 pm as follows:

Date	Topic	Location
October 15	General overview of the study process including the committee's role; review of the district's current position	Junior Senior High School
December 3	Complete review of the district's current position; explore possible future organizational options	TBD
December 17	Review of draft report and tentative recommendations	TBD

While the meetings of the advisory committee will begin at 6:30 pm, optional tours of the two elementary schools will be held before each of the next two meetings beginning at 5:45 pm. These tours are for committee members and for anyone that will be observing the meeting that will follow.

4. A contact list of the members of the Advisory Committee was shared with email addresses. Members of the group were asked to verify the accuracy of the information since email will serve as the primary means of communication between the consultants and the committee members. Meeting materials will be emailed to all committee members prior to the meeting. Paper copies of the materials will also be made available at each meeting.

5. Meeting notes will be provided after each meeting. The notes will be emailed to all committee members and copied to the superintendent. It will be the responsibility of the superintendent to



distribute the notes within the district, as he deems appropriate. It is anticipated that, at a minimum, notes will be provided to board members and posted on the district's website. The Power Point that is used at each meeting will also be posted on the district's website after the meeting occurs.

6. All meetings of the advisory committee will be open. Members of the public will be welcome at these meetings. At the conclusion of each meeting, the observers will have the opportunity to offer comments or ask questions.

7. Alan Pole presented a Power Point overview of the study process and the role of the advisory committee. He indicated that the function of the committee is to advise the Board of Education and the consultants, to communicate with the public about the process, and to prepare informative materials. In short, the committee will add a cultural context for Unatego as the various aspects of the study emerge. The superintendent is not a member of the committee but serves as a resource to the committee. Committee members are expected to attend all committee meetings, freely express their points of view, be key communicators with stakeholder groups, and be a respectful, contributing member of the committee.

He emphasized that the consultants bring an outside, unbiased perspective and will ensure that the process is open. They will produce meetings notes after each committee meeting and will be responsible for the final report. The recommendations in the report will benefit student learning and will be educationally sound and fiscally responsible. They will also be independent of special interest groups.

8. Bill Silky presented an overview of past enrollments for Unatego as well as projected future enrollments for the district. The study begins by reviewing enrollment trends since enrollments influence all decisions regarding staffing, class and curricular offerings, facilities, transportation, and finances.

Enrollment has been declining since at least 2010-11 when the analysis began. Since 2010-2011, the enrollment in Unatego has declined from 1,042 students to 895 students in the 2015-16 school year, a decline of 14.1%.

To predict future enrollment, the consultants employ the Cohort Survival Projection method that uses information on the number of births in each school district over a period of years and calculates patterns of enrollment. A cohort survival ratio is developed that tracks how each cohort of students changes as it moves through the grade levels. This ratio, used with the live birth information, predicts what the enrollment will be for a period of years given consistent and predictable conditions. It does not take into account significant economic development changes such as a major employer leaving or entering the area and other similar changes. However, it is not anticipated that either of these conditions will be taking place in Unatego.

Using this method, the enrollment in Unatego is predicted to decrease from 895 in 2015-16 to 774 students in the 2022-2023 school year, an additional decline of 13.5%. The number of home schooled students, non-resident students, and resident students enrolled in non-public schools are all factors that are considered in projecting enrollment. It does not appear that any of these factors will significantly influence the enrollment projections that were made for Unatego. Bill also reviewed demographic information for Otsego County as well as the major towns and villages within the school district. This review clearly demonstrated that, like the school district enrollment, a general decline for past years has occurred and a similar decline is projected into the future.



9. Alan Pole provided an overview of the district's facilities as evaluated by the Building Conditions Survey conducted in 2010. The district is in the process of having its Building Conditions Survey updated. Information from that survey should be available for a future meeting.

10. Alan also reviewed the elementary school class sizes as well as current space utilization for all three of the district's buildings. It was clear from the presentation that there is a significant amount of space in each of the buildings that is not being used to its maximum capacity. Bill Silky then reviewed a number of factors relating to grade alignment concluding that there is no "one best way" to organize school district grade levels.

11. Bill Silky provided a brief overview of the special education services in the district and well as the single trip transportation system that is currently being used in the district. He also reviewed the district balance sheet for June 30, 2015 that showed an unassigned fund balance of only \$280,725. Finally, Bill noted that the district has been determined to be in moderate fiscal distress.

12. Committee members were then asked to work in groups to determine the three most important "take-aways" that they had learned at the meeting. The groups reported the following responses:

- ✓ The district is experiencing declining enrollment which is expected to continue;
- ✓ The district has excess space in its buildings;
- ✓ The district is in financial difficulty;
- ✓ The time that students spend on the bus should be considered as part of this study;
- ✓ Keep the public informed about the progress of this study

13. The meeting was opened up to the observers for questions and comments. There were a number of comments that were made from those in attendance.

14. The next advisory committee meeting will be held on Thursday, December 3, 2015 at one of the elementary schools. An optional tour of the school will begin at 5:45 for anyone who is interested. The meeting of the Advisory Committee will begin at 6:30 p.m.

We believe this covers the essence of the discussions at our meeting on October 15. If you have questions with these notes, please feel free to contact me. We will also review these notes as the first agenda item at our next meeting.

Looking forward to seeing you again on 12.3.15. We will let you know where the meeting will be held prior to December 3. In any event, the tour will begin at 5:45 and meeting will start at 6:30!!

C: David Richards



MEMORANDUM

TO: Unatego Facilities Study Advisory Committee
FROM: Alan Pole and Bill Silky
RE: Meeting Notes-Meeting of December 3, 2015
DATE: December 7, 2015

Attendance:

Committee Members: Jeanne Butler, Heather Coleman, Ron Decker, Ed Frazier, Scott Garino, Kim Gascon, Patti Hoyt, Katie James, Lew Keyser, Ernie Kroll, Elaine Lowe, Katherine Mazourek, Kelly Poje, Tyler Post (for Terry Brown), Melanie Ruff, Fran Secor, and Kim Trask
Consultants: Alan Pole and Bill Silky

Observers: Ed Horan, Allison Collins, Sandra Banczkowski, Brenda McEntee, Angela Flavell, Ruth Modinger, Kathy Knox, J McDermott, Stuart Anderson, Shaun Barnes, Roger Butler, Mike Carson, and Bert Beames

Superintendent: David Richards

Location: Otego Elementary School

1. Superintendent Dave Richards, who was not able to attend the last meeting, welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked them for their participation on this committee and introduced the study consultants.
2. Bill Silky reviewed the future meetings of the advisory committee as follows:

Date	Topic	Location
December 17	Continued exploration of possible options	Unadilla Elementary
January 21	Continued exploration of possible options and tentative conclusions/recommendations from consultants	Junior-Senior High School
March 1*	Review of draft final report	TBD

While the meetings of the advisory committee will begin at 6:30 pm, optional tours of Unadilla Elementary and the Junior-Senior High School will be held before each of the next two meetings beginning at 5:45 pm. These optional tours are for committee members and for anyone that will be observing the meeting that will follow.

3. Alan Pole provided an analysis of the middle school and high school room utilization. There are 49 classrooms that are used an average of 5.8 periods out of a 9 period day. There are 7 empty classrooms including the faculty room and the board room and 6 full size classrooms are currently being used for special education resource rooms. Currently, there are 3 sections of 5th grade, 3 sections of 4th grade, and 3 sections of 3rd grade so it appears that 5th grade could be moved into the high school.

4. Staffing reductions that have been made by the district were reviewed. In the past 5 years, approximately 20-25 positions have been reduced.

5. Utility costs were reviewed for the three school campuses. If the Otego Elementary School were to be closed, approximately \$35,000 in utility costs could be saved.



6. In the event that one elementary school was closed, it appears that the following positions might be able to be eliminated: 1 principal, 1 secretary, 1 RN, 1 computer lab teaching assistant, 1 music teacher, 0.5 PE teacher, 1.5 custodial positions, and 1 cafeteria worker. This could amount to approximately \$392,000.

7. The architects are in the process of completing the building conditions survey and calculating the estimated costs of building a K-5 elementary school on the junior-senior high school campus. Neither of these things had been completed so they will be carried over to the next meeting.

8. Alan Pole reviewed “feasible” and “desirable” options as follows. Feasible options are grade/building arrangements that can be implemented based on available space and facility conditions. Desirable options are grade/building arrangements that are feasible *and* are desirable based on available space, facility conditions, educational soundness and fiscal responsibility.

9. Bill Silky reviewed three options for the facilities. He then asked the advisory committee members to break up into groups in order to define advantages and disadvantages for each option AND to determine if there should be additional options considered. The following is the input from the advisory committee.

Option 1: Remaining as is (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12)

<u>Pros</u>	<u>Cons</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *will not create turmoil (no disruption): keeps everyone happy * <i>fifth grade can remain where they have recess</i> *<i>fifth grade would not be mixed in with high school students; keeps age groups separate</i> *<i>PreK can be housed at Unadilla</i> *<i>don't have to deal with maintaining an empty building</i> *<i>room for growth</i> *<i>maintains property values in village</i> *<i>“desirability”</i> *<i>keeps enrollment up????</i> *<i>needs of age groups are being met</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *inefficient use of space in the schools *does not offer any financial savings *<i>if nothing changes now, nothing will change</i> *<i>instructional time is lost at the end of each day for busing</i> *<i>annual repair costs</i> *<i>future costs are unpredictable</i>

(Italics indicate thoughts of the committee members.)

NOTES:

1-One group noted that there should be a five year plan for this option



Option 2: Close Otego Elementary School, make Unadilla K-4, move 5th grade to the Middle School

<u>Pros</u>	<u>Cons</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *makes much better use of space *offers considerable financial savings <i>*no shuttle buses like we have now so instructional impact won't be great like it is now; improves transportation overall</i> <i>*more opportunities for teachers to collaborate</i> <i>*more accommodating for parents not to have multiple elementary buildings</i> <i>*more opportunity for student interactions among grade levels (buddy reading, writing, etc.)</i> <i>*easy for service provider schedules (i.e., counselors)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *backlash due to emotional attachment to the Otego Elementary School. *K-2 students from the Otego Elementary School would have to ride the bus longer *there would likely be some staff members that would lose jobs <i>*fifth grade is too young for our current building set-up at MS/HS; maturity level of students; how did moving 6th grade to the middle school work?</i> <i>*after school program—those families that live in Otego will have to travel to Unadilla to pickup students</i> <i>*loss of room for growth</i> <i>*question of impact on home values of taxpayers and therefore loss of tax revenue to school district; desirability for home buyers and maybe lose families to other districts</i> <i>*Unadilla floods</i> <i>*cost of perhaps relocating the bus garage</i> <i>*lack of extra gym and field space</i> <i>*more difficulty scheduling specials, lunches, etc.</i> <i>*lessens possibility of PK</i> <i>*less space for tier groups and accommodating test mods</i>

(Italics indicate thoughts of the committee members.)

NOTE: One comment as a con was there recently has been a re-assessment in one town that shifted the burden of taxes between towns. While we recognize this may be a concern to residents of the school district, we don't believe it is either a pro or con for this study as it is out of the control of the school district. Another group noted that there should be a five year plan for this option.

Option 3: Close both elementary schools and build a new K-5 elementary school on the Junior-Senior High School campus.

<u>Pros</u>	<u>Cons</u>
*would most likely make better use of	*backlash due to emotional attachment to



district space *would ensure an up-to-date elementary school for 20st century learning *transportation would be shorter for some elementary students; <i>bus transferring issue disappear</i> *gaining 20 minutes of instructional time *more accommodating for parents not to have multiple elementary buildings *more opportunity for student interactions among grade levels (buddy reading, writing, etc.) *easy for service provider schedules (i.e., counselors) *No Otego vs. Unadilla—nobody wins; no more Otego vs. Unadilla mentality *there would no longer be flooding concerns *makes it easier to share services between the elementary and MS/HS	both the Otego and Unadilla elementary schools *there is a local cost to building a new school *transportation would be longer for some elementary students *empty buildings and what to do with them in both towns *length of time before a new school is built (5 years) and difficulty having to get a proposition passed *bus garage is still at Otego *the parking lot is already an issue at the MS/HS so it would need to be redesigned
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(Italics indicate thought of the committee members.)

NOTES:

- 1-One group suggested using Greenies existing building as base for new elementary
- 2-A group suggested possibly closing Otego while building a new campus as an option
- 3-Whether there is enough site space was one question a group listed
- 4-One group simply listed that this option is not feasible at present and did not list any pros or cons.

Option 4: Close Unadilla Elementary School, make Otego K-?, move remaining elementary grades to the Middle School and some number of Middle School grades to the High School.

<u>Pros</u>	<u>Cons</u>

NOTE: This was an option brought up by the committee that will be explored from a space perspective and further discussed at a future meeting.

10. The meeting was opened up to the committee members and to observers for questions and comments. There were a number of comments and questions including the following:

- What is the appraised value of the district's buildings?
- How much is owed on the buildings?
- What is the impact on property values when schools close in a community?



Is there a capital reserve for helping to finance future capital projects?

Can Unadilla be closed? This is option #4 above.

Responses to all of the questions will be provided at the next meeting.

11. The next advisory committee meeting will be held on Thursday, December 17, 2015 at Unadilla Elementary School. An optional tour of the school will begin at 5:45 for anyone who is interested. The meeting of the Advisory Committee will begin at 6:30 p.m.

We believe this covers the essence of the discussions at our meeting on December 3. If you have questions with these notes, please feel free to contact me. We will also review these notes as the first agenda item at our next meet at Unadilla Elementary.....tour will begin at 5:45 and meeting will start at 6:30!!

C: David Richards



MEMORANDUM

TO: Unatego Facilities Study Advisory Committee
FROM: Alan Pole and Bill Silky
RE: Meeting Notes-Meeting of December 17, 2015
DATE: December 21, 2015

Attendance:

Committee Members: Jeanne Butler, Heather Coleman, Ron Decker, Ed Frazier, Scott Garno, Kim Gascon, Patti Hoyt, Katie James, Lew Keyser, Ernie Kroll, Elaine Lowe, Katherine Mazourek, Kelly Poje, Tyler Post (for Terry Brown), Melanie Ruff, Fran Secor, and Kim Trask
Consultants: Alan Pole and Bill Silky

Observers: Ed Horan, Allison Collins, Brenda McEntee, J McDermott, Stuart Anderson, Steve Thesier, Bill Sands, Ruth Modinger, Dick Downey, Brian Trask, Joann Raso, Gene Schoeck, Bill Cook, and Rodney Renwick

Superintendent: David Richards

Location: Unadilla Elementary School

1. Alan Pole welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the process for the conduct of the meeting. He also reviewed the future meetings of the advisory committee as follows:

Date	Topic	Location
January 21	Financial implications and tentative conclusions/recommendations from consultants	Junior-Senior High School
March 1	Review of draft final report	Junior-Senior High School

There will be an optional tour of the Junior-Senior High School before the next meeting beginning at 5:45 pm. These optional tours are for committee members and for anyone that will be observing the meeting that will follow. The January 21 business meeting will begin at 6:30 pm.

2. Alan Pole introduced Steve Thesier and Bill Sands from the BCK/IBI Group, the district's architect and engineers. They attended the meeting in order to answer questions regarding the Building Condition Survey and the projected cost for a new elementary school.

3. Alan Pole provided an overview of the following PowerPoint slides:

a. It does not appear possible to close the Unadilla Elementary School given the current space available in the district;

b. Results of the Building Condition Survey showing the following amounts listed for each building:

- ✓ Bus Garage-\$317,000
- ✓ Unadilla Elementary-\$3,325,000
- ✓ Otego Elementary-\$3,971,000
- ✓ Jr. Sr. High School-\$7,315,000

c. Should the district decide to build a new K-5 elementary school on the junior-senior high school campus, the building would be approximately 52,000 square feet and cost approximately \$19,000,000.



4. Bill Silky discussed the research behind school closure and the impact on home values. If an elementary school closes thus increasing the distance from home to school, it has an adverse affect on property values. On the other hand, when the perceived quality of a school improves, it positively impacts home values. Therefore it appears to be unclear what effect closing an elementary school would have on a community. Bill reviewed the histories of assessed values in Altmar-Parish-Williamstown and Sidney, two districts that had elementary school closures, and their assessed or full values had both increased.

5. As requested by the committee, Bill Silky reviewed the appraised value of the school buildings as follows:

- ✓ Otego Elementary-\$9,053,464
- ✓ Unadilla Elementary-\$13,465,274
- ✓ Junior-Senior High School-\$36,679,542
- ✓ Bus Garage-\$641,319

Bill informed the committee that, from the evidence of schools that have sold buildings, it would unrealistic to expect to sell a school for anywhere near its appraised value.

6. Bill Silky reviewed the debt service that the district is facing through the 2025 school year. He indicated that as debt service declines it provides an opportunity to perhaps add the savings to a capital fund to help pay for future school improvements.

7. Bill reviewed the impact on transportation that he had discussed with Brian Trask. It does not appear that there is a significant impact on the cost of transportation whether the district chooses option 1, 2, or 3. However, the amount of wait time that students currently have on the bus would decrease if the district chose either option 2 or 3.

8. Bill Silky reviewed three options for the facilities. He then asked the advisory committee members to break up into groups in order to further review advantages and disadvantages for each option AND to determine if there should be additional options considered. This is a continuing refinement of the work that the committee did at the last meeting. The groups reviewed the advantages and disadvantages of each option but did not come up with any new options. The options that the groups considered are the following:

Option 1: Remaining as is (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12)

Option 2: Close Otego Elementary School, make Unadilla K-4, move 5th grade to the Middle School

Option 3: Close both elementary schools and build a new K-5 elementary school on the Junior-Senior High School campus.

9. The meeting was opened up to the committee members and to observers for questions and comments. There were a number of comments and questions including the following:

- ✓ The shuttle bus system is bad. There is too much down time on buses for the students.



- ✓ Regardless of how much is done to the elementary schools, they are still old buildings. Option 3 is the best option.
- ✓ There is room on the junior-senior high school campus for a new elementary school.
- ✓ The current shuttle bus system is crazy. There are approximately 90 hours of instructional time per year that is lost for the students.
- ✓ Make the educational impact more important. This study has to be about the kids. The students need more classroom time.

10. The next advisory committee meeting will be held on Thursday, January 21, 2016 at Junior-Senior High School. An optional tour of the school will begin at 5:45 for anyone who is interested. The meeting of the Advisory Committee will begin at 6:30 p.m.

We believe this covers the essence of the discussions at our meeting on December 17. If you have questions with these notes, please feel free to contact me. We will also review these notes as the first agenda item at our next meet at the Junior-Senior High School.....tour will begin at 5:45 and meeting will start at 6:30!!

C: David Richards



MEMORANDUM

TO: Unatego Facilities Study Advisory Committee
 FROM: Alan Pole and Bill Silky
 RE: Meeting Notes-Meeting of January 21, 2016
 DATE: January 24, 2016

Attendance:

Committee Members: Jeanne Butler, Heather Coleman, Scott Garno, Kim Gascon, Patti Hoyt, Katie James, Lew Keyser, Elaine Lowe, Katherine Mazourek, Kelly Poje, Tyler Post (for Terry Brown), Melanie Ruff, Fran Secor, and Kim Trask

Consultants: Alan Pole and Bill Silky

Observers: Ed Horan, Allison Collins, Sandra Banczkowski, Brenda McEntee, Ruth Modinger, Stuart Anderson, Mike Carson, Dick Downey, Christine Brown, and Betty Kiel

Superintendent: David Richards

Location: Unatego Middle/High High School

1. Bill Silky welcomed everyone to the meeting, reviewed the procedures for the conduct of the meeting, and thanked Patti Hoyt for providing a tour of the middle/high school. He also reviewed the future meetings of the advisory committee as follows:

Date	Topic	Location
January 21	Continued exploration of possible options and tentative conclusions/recommendations from consultants	Middle/High School
March 1	Review of draft final report	Middle/High School

2. Bill reviewed a table that showed the percentage of the school taxes paid by the residents of the Town of Otego compared with taxes that are paid by residents of the Town of Unadilla. Otego residents pay approximately 48% of the tax levy while Unadilla residents pay approximately 40% of the levy. This is due, at least in part, to the fact that the full property value in Otego is approximately 15% higher than it is in Unadilla.

3. Alan Pole reviewed the three options that are currently before the committee with respect to the future direction for the study. These three options are as follows:

Option 1: Remaining as is (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12)

Option 2: Close Otego Elementary School, make Unadilla K-4, move 5th grade to the Middle School

Option 3: Close both elementary schools and build a new K-5 elementary school on the Middle/High School campus.

He then followed up with a discussion from the last meeting about whether or not a fourth option should be added for consideration. That fourth option would be as follows:

Option 4: Close Unadilla Elementary School, make Otego K-4, move 5th grade to the Middle School.

Alan also noted that the staff savings of approximately \$400,000 that would be realized if one of the elementary schools was to close would be the same regardless of which elementary school closed. He also pointed out that the Unadilla building is nearly twice as large in square footage as



the Otego building. After a significant amount of discussion, the committee decided to include Option 4 as part of the study.

4. Bill then reviewed the financial implications of the different options. He concluded that, on a \$100,000 house, there would be tax savings of approximately \$75 to \$186 depending on the township in which a person lived if option 2 were to be implemented and salary and benefit savings were phase in over two years. He also examined the impact on a \$100,000 home if option 3 were to be implemented and concluded that there would be tax savings of approximately \$60-\$110 again depending on the township in which a person resided.

5. Bill also reviewed some of the key findings from the study.

6. During the course of the meeting, there were two other options that were offered for consideration. The first of these was offered by a member of the committee and was referred to as option 2b. Option 2b is as follows:

Option 2b: Close Otego Elementary School, make Unadilla K-5

After a considerable amount of discussion, the committee agreed that Option 2b should be added to the study.

7. A second new option was offered by a member of the audience and was referred to as Option 4b. Option 4b is as follows:

Option 4b: Close Unadilla Elementary School, make Otego K-3, move 4th and 5th grades to the Middle School.

After a considerable amount of discussion, the committee agreed that Option 4b would **not** be added to the study.

8. The meeting was opened up to the audience in order to solicit comments and questions. These comments and questions included the following:

a. Is there really enough site space at the middle/high school campus for a new K-5 elementary school? (This determination is being finalized by the district's architects and will be discussed further at the next meeting.)

b. Be sure to leave room in the elementary school(s) for the addition of a pre-K program.

c. While the finances of this study are very important, the main focus of the recommendations should be on improving the educational program students and this could be best accomplished by building a new elementary school.

d. No matter how many renovations are made to the two elementary schools, they will still be 90 years old buildings and will continue to need work.

e. It is very disappointing that, if the elementary school(s) is/are sold, the revenue that will be realized from the sale will be significantly below the current appraised value of the buildings. And, it would be disappointing to take a financial hit selling the Otego building after money has been put into it in recent years.

f. A question was asked as to how the square footage of each building is determined by the architects. The consultants will attempt to get an answer to this question.

9. The next advisory committee meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 1, 2016 at the middle/high school. The meeting of the Advisory Committee will begin at 6:30 p.m. There will be no building tour.

We believe this covers the essence of the discussions at our meeting on January 21. If you have questions with these notes, please feel free to contact me. We will also review these notes as the first agenda item at our next meeting on March 1 at 6:30 in the middle/high school.

C: David Richards



MEMORANDUM

TO: Unatego Facilities Study Advisory Committee
FROM: Alan Pole and Bill Silky
RE: Meeting Notes-Meeting of March 1, 2016
DATE: March 5, 2016

Attendance:

Committee Members: Terry Brown, Jeanne Butler, Heather Coleman, Ron Decker, Ed Frazier, Scott Garno, Kim Gascon, Patti Hoyt, Katie James, Lew Keyser, Elaine Lowe, Katherine Mazourek, Kelly Poje, Melanie Ruff, Fran Secor, and Kim Trask

Consultants: Alan Pole and Bill Silky

Observers: Ken Olsen, Carol Olsen, David Welch, Sandra Bonczkowski, Kathleen Clark, Courtney Goodspeed, Andrew Goodspeed, Byron McMichael, Chad Angellotti, Ruth Modinger, Dick Downey, G.X. Cramatte, Bert Beames, Buzz Hesse, Karen Gilbertson, Sandy Greenman, Stuart Anderson, Michael Carson, j McDermott, Allison Collins, Gene Schoeck, Brian Davis, and Ernie Kroll

Superintendent: David Richards

Location: Unatego Middle/High School

1. Alan Pole welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the agenda and the procedures for the conduct of the meeting.
2. Alan distributed a letter and a flyer from the Benson Agency Real Estate Company regarding the 81 acre parcel of property that adjoins the middle/high school campus formerly known as Greenie's Auto World. These documents announced that the property is for sale for \$2,900,000.
3. At the last meeting, the committee discussed adding an option 2. b. to the list of future considerations for the use of the district's facilities. This option would close the Otego Elementary School, move the K-2 students to Unadilla Elementary School, and (unlike option 2) keep the 5th grade students in the elementary school. Alan asked the committee to elaborate on why this is an attractive option. The general response was that 5th graders fit much better in the elementary school from a maturation standpoint. The only concern expressed regarding this option was whether or not this would leave room for a possible pre-K classroom in the future.
4. Bill Silky provided updates from the last committee meeting which included the following:
 - ✓ The recent NYS Comptroller's Report concluded that the district's financial condition is still not strong for the future;
 - ✓ There is room on the middle/high school campus to locate a new elementary school; a *concept* sketch from the district's architects was shown; and,
 - ✓ The district had submitted a proposal for a full day pre-K program for 4 year olds that had a half-year budget of \$87,607. The proposal was not funded;
5. Bill Silky then provided the key findings from the draft study. Alan Pole concluded this portion of the presentation by sharing the conclusion to the study that there is a better way educationally and fiscally to reconfigure the grades to provide a sound instructional program. He also shared tentative recommendations from the study that included the following:
 1. It is recommended that, effective with the 2016-17 school year:
 - a. The Otego Elementary School should be closed;
 - b. Grades K-2 should be moved from the Otego Elementary School to the Unadilla Elementary School;



- c. Grade 5 should be moved from the Unadilla Elementary School to the Unatego Middle School.
 2. It is further recommended that, upon closing the Otego Elementary School, the school district should implement the staffing savings identified in this study using attrition.
 3. It is further recommended that the district secure voter approval to establish a capital reserve account at its earliest convenience.
 4. It is further recommended that the district fund its capital reserve account with the monies that are saved from the staffing reductions in #2 above, with any reductions in the district's debt service (\$75,976 in 2016-17, \$414 in 2017-18, and \$49,674 in 2018-19), and any other surplus finds that are generated at the end of the fiscal year.
 5. It is further recommended that the district convene a facilities planning committee whose role it will be to develop a long term facilities plan for the district including the design of a new elementary school to be located on the middle/high school campus.
 6. It is further recommended that the Unadilla Elementary School be closed in the same year that the new elementary school is ready for use.
 7. It is further recommended that the district should immediately explore the possible sale and/or leasing of the Otego Elementary School.
6. Prior to asking for committee reactions to the report, Alan Pole reviewed the four options that are currently before the committee. These four options are as follows:
- Option 1:** Remaining as is (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12)
- Option 2:** Close Otego Elementary School, make Unadilla K-4, move 5th grade to the Middle School
- Option 2.b:** Close Otego Elementary School, make Unadilla K-5
- Option 3:** Close both elementary schools and build a new K-5 elementary school on the Middle/High School campus.
- Option 4:** Close Unadilla Elementary School, make Otego K-4, move 5th grade to the Middle School
7. The meeting was then opened up to the committee and meeting observers in order to solicit comments and questions on the draft report. These comments and questions included the following:
- If Otego closes, what would happen to the bus garage?
 - Keep the buildings open one more year and vote on a new elementary school. If the vote passes, then decide on a timeline for closing and the procedures for closing the elementary schools.
 - The greatest benefit of this plan is a new elementary school that is really needed.
 - While it is nice to consider using attrition when reducing staff, it is important to realize the savings; therefore even if people are affected, the positions should be eliminated as soon as possible.
 - There was concern expressed that the septic tank at Otego Elementary has a very short expected life; therefore it should be replaced regardless of what is decided.



- If the septic tank goes, a question was asked as to where the students would go while it was being replaced.
- Option 2-b is the best option.
- Finding bus drivers will be a problem; there is a shortage everywhere and a number of current drivers will be retiring in the next few years.
- A concern that a closure next year (2016-17) is unrealistic.
- A new school would be wonderful and we want to do what is best for the students.
- A new school would be a draw for people and protect property values; moving it forward is responsible.
- Keep the 5th graders in the elementary school.
- Would K-6, 7-12 be a better arrangement than the options proposed?
- A timeline with steps for any changes is needed.
- Think big...do something with the middle and high school as well as the elementary schools.
- The district should have funded a capital reserve a long time ago. The tax cap has prevented this.
- If both schools are eventually going to be closed, the study should contain a statement about the district looking to sell the Unadilla building.
- The Board needs to think about the future of the two villages. Twenty-five to thirty homes in the village (Unadilla) are for sale now. Most residents are 65 or older and can't sell their homes. The flood insurance is a problem also. If the school closes, the tax base will decline.
- A realtor said it is hard to sell homes here. The only people buying homes are second homebuyers from NYC and New Jersey that want large acreage. If Otego Elementary is closed, more people will choose to move to Oneonta and this will affect property values. Also, flood zone insurance is affecting property values.
- We need Pre-K now to get young families to move here; meet the needs of families to increase our student numbers.
- We wanted to build a new school years ago and didn't do it, I am in favor of it now.
- Government is inefficient, but we like this rural life. We need to decide as two towns what do we want this place to be decades from now. Thinks the district needs to keep the schools open for five years until residents can have a community discussion of what they want the communities to be.
- The community needs to discuss this with the Board
- A change has to be made; it is time
- The ultimate decision needs to be community driven.
- The elementary buildings are too old to spend \$3-4 million on each of them.
- I moved here to be near the school for my young children. If the school closes we would look to leave. We want our kids close by and would stay if a new school is built.
- I am impressed with all points of view. Look at real sales of property, not assessed values. Real estate sales have declined dramatically because of assessment issues. The Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) is a problem. It is cheaper to fix the buildings that we have rather than to spend \$18-20 million on a new elementary school.

We believe this covers the essence of the discussions at our meeting on March 1st. If you have questions with these notes, please feel free to contact me.



C: David Richards